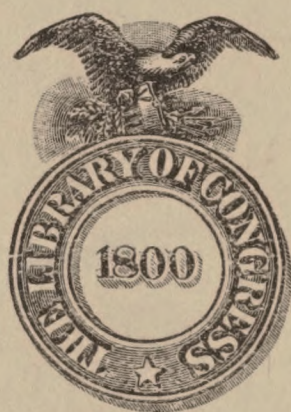




IN SEARCH OF  
AN UNKNOWN  
RACE

FRANK · H · CONVERSE





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In Search of an Unknown Race













VAN SEES THE GREAT JAGUAR BROUGHT DOWN BY THE ARROWS OF THE  
DWARFISH HUNTERS.



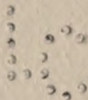
# IN SEARCH OF AN UNKNOWN RACE

BY

FRANK H. CONVERSE

AUTHOR OF

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"THE MYSTERY OF A DIAMOND," "THAT TREASURE," ETC.



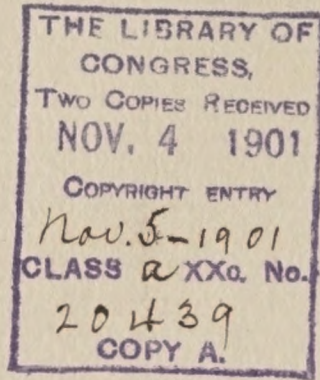
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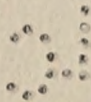
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# IN SEARCH OF AN UNKNOWN RACE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A MESSAGE FROM THE UNKNOWN LAND.

THE schooner Rattler lay at an outside berth of a Boston wharf ready to sail on the following morning. In the snug cabin below, Captain Josh Peterson, a squarely-built, middle-aged seaman, with a resolute weather-beaten face, had just shaken hands, for at least the third time, with a manly-looking young fellow in his seventeenth year, who had just come on board.

Van Briscoe—for by this name will the hero of my story be known—was tall and sinewy for his years, with pleasant clear-cut features, a trifle bronzed by sea air.

He had but that day arrived in Boston from New York, where for three years he had been on board the school ship St. Mary's. He had paid a flying visit to one of the suburban towns close to Boston, where



Captain Peterson's maiden sister resided, and now had come aboard in accordance with an arrangement with the captain, who was his guardian.

"Van," said Captain Peterson, as he nervously drew a tin case from his desk, "I—there's something a—a—little out of the ordinary run of things to be talked over——"

And checking himself abruptly, he stepped to the door which led to the outer cabin. There he listened, locked the door, and then, after glancing up the after companionway to make sure the slide was pulled over, returned to his seat at the table.

"As you know, Van," he commenced in a low tone, "the Rattler is bound for Para, in Brazil, and thence up the Amazon on a trading voyage."

Van assented.

"You have heard me speak of your uncle, Richard Vance Briscoe," Captain Peterson went on, "your father's twin brother, who sailed as passenger for San Francisco, in 1865, on board the Argonaut, afterward reported as lost on the Peruvian coast with all on board?"

"That was the year before father died on the passage from the south coast of Africa," replied Van a little irrelevantly. But the reference to the uncle he had never seen had suddenly suggested to his mind how utterly alone he was in the world. His mother had died at Van's birth, his father (who had been a sea captain) was buried in mid-ocean, and, so far as he knew, Van had neither kith nor kin in the world.

Without replying directly, Captain Peterson took from the tin case a letter written on bluish paper like parch-



ment, which exhaled a strange, spicy odor as he unfolded it. On the back of the sheet, Van saw the outline of a map cleverly drawn in a sort of golden-tinted ink, and in one corner was the impress of a seal of singular design. A hand clasping a burning torch was encircled by a serpent holding the tip of its tail in its mouth—the ancients' symbol of eternity.

"A year ago this month," began Captain Peterson nervously, "a big, sailorish-looking chap, who called himself Robert Martin, came aboard the Rattler with this letter, which was directed to Captain James Briscoe, your father, in care of Davis & Co., ship brokers. Martin had been there with it, and they sent him to me, knowing that I, as your father's administrator, was his only representative excepting yourself. Martin had a remarkably strange story to tell that was fully corroborated by the contents of this letter, which he left. Then, taking out his clasp knife, he ripped open the collar of his coarse flannel shirt, and, from at least a dozen diamonds of the purest water which he had sewed in the lining, selected the largest. 'This goes with the letter—you'll understand the whole thing when you come to read it,' he said, and before I could stop him, Martin was gone. I've never set eyes on him since then," said Captain Peterson, drawing a long breath, "though, for reasons you'll soon understand, I would give a hundred dollars to-day to be able to lay my hand on Bob Martin."

"But the letter," eagerly exclaimed Van. "Who was it from? what is it about?"

"That's what I've been coming at," replied the captain, "and now if you'll listen without interruption,



you'll hear something that will astonish you, to say the least."

Thus premising, Captain Peterson cleared his throat, and, in a voice suggestive of repressed excitement, began :

"CITY OF ITAMBEZ,  
" PROVINCE OF ITAMBEZI, BRAZIL. }

"BROTHER JAMES,

"Of course you have thought of me as dead all these years. The bearer of this letter, Robert Martin, will tell you to the contrary. Whatever he says, no matter how incredible it may sound in your ears, you may implicitly believe. For reasons which you may some time understand, I am not allowed to explain how Martin and myself, the only survivors of the Argonaut, reached this region, hitherto unvisited by strangers, after terrible privation and suffering. Indeed, it is only through a special edict that I have been after all this time permitted to communicate with you through Martin, who, very foolishly, has resolved to leave this wonderful city—but a sailor would grow tired of Paradise itself in time.

"Of the people of Itambez I am not allowed to say anything in this letter. Their history and characteristics must for the present remain a mystery to you as well as to the outside world. But regarding the wealth of the country I am permitted to say that it is simply fabulous.

"Now, to come to the point. By a freak of fortune, I have risen to hold an important position in Itambez, through which I have been granted a favor unprecedented in the city's history, namely, to share with my



kindred some of the great wealth which I have accumulated, provided they have the courage *to come here after it*. In this case, the only restrictions are these : Should you or any of yours decide to thus do, guided by the map drawn on the back of this letter and my brief instructions, such visitor will be allowed to bring two comrades (as alone, it would be impossible to reach the province of Itambezi) who must never reveal certain things which will come to their knowledge.

“The first part of the route traced out on the map is comparatively easy—being simply the ascent of the Amazon to its junction with the branch called the Uraria, connecting the Amazon with the Madeira. Midway of the branch the Canuma river enters it. Follow up the Canuma to the lake of the same name, into the further side of which flows the same Canuma, which rises among the Cordilleras. Whoever shall reach Canuma Lake bringing this letter, which has the imprint of the royal seal, has no further difficulty. His or their responsibility ceases, and such person or persons are taken in charge by others.

“The stone that Martin will deliver with this letter is an earnest of my sincerity. He may show you others of his own as well.

“Given at the council chamber in the eleventh month of the year 1884, under the authority of the Council of Seven.

“RICHARD VANCE BRISCOE.”

During the reading of this most extraordinary message, Van's face was a study. Curiosity, astonishment and incredulity in turns strove for the mastery.



"It is the strangest thing I ever heard in all my life," he exclaimed. "But what do *you* think, Captain Peterson?"

"What *can* I think otherwise than to believe the whole thing is just as you've heard it?" was the grave reply. "The letter is in your uncle's own handwriting, which I could swear to anywhere, while everything it contains confirms Martin's story."

But despite the captain's assertion, no less than the written proof, Van's practical, matter of fact nature could not take in all at once anything that bordered so closely upon the marvelous.

"I'm not going to urge this thing, Van," said Captain Peterson, who seemed rather disappointed at the short silence that had followed his reply; "but between now and our arrival at Para I want you to think it over seriously, for it looks to me as though a fortune lies within your reach. But we won't say any more to-night, for it's getting late and we must be on deck bright and early."

Very soon Van found himself in his comfortable berth, but it was some time before slumber visited his eyelids.

The singular revelation to which he had listened—the knowledge that his only relative, so long regarded as dead, was not only living but was a denizen of a mysterious country not unlike the fairyland of which he had read in boyhood, and the possibilities thus suggested, filled his mind to overflowing.

Finally he fell asleep, to be roused at daybreak by Captain Peterson. "Now, then, Mr. Briscoe!" he said, and realizing that with his new prefix of "Mr." his



duties as a vessel's officer were to be taken up, Van hurried on deck.

The morning was cold and gray, with a fierce northwest wind shrieking through the rigging. Muffled in their pilot coats the Rattler's commander and his young officer moved about the decks, directing the men, who were taking off the sail covers and casting the stops from the stiff canvas.

Most of the new crew had the collars of their ragged coats turned up and their shabby caps pulled well down, to protect their ears and faces from the biting cold ; so Van could not form a very good idea what manner of men they might be, with one exception.

This was an almost gigantic negro with heavy, good-natured features, whose strength, as Van quickly perceived, was something almost incredible. He answered to the name of "Tom," and when Van noticed him unaided lift the end of the kedge anchor forward to clear a line, he resolved if possible to have *that* man in his watch.

Though a novice as far as holding office was concerned, Van was no greenhorn as to his duties. Six short voyages in the school ship had thoroughly posted him in the practical details of seamanship, and with Captain Peterson to give him points, he speedily began to gain confidence. He soon saw, too, that despite his youth, the crew recognized the fact that he was a first-rate sailor, and by no means backward in pulling and hauling with the rest when occasion required.

By nightfall Cape Cod was being left astern. The decks were cleared up, everything made fast, and the crew mustered aft for choice of watches. Van took



care to secure the negro Tom, who, with two other sailors, composed his watch.

In the captain's were Smith, a dwarfed fellow with immensely broad shoulders, long arms, and disproportionately short legs, and an English sailor calling himself Carson, while the third, who had shipped under the name of Bates, was a good-looking young man seemingly not much more than twenty years old.

Strangely enough, Bates—if that was his real name—soon showed himself to be the smartest man in the crew. And not only that, but Van, who at once was interested in the young sailor's appearance, noticed two curious things.

His language at times suggested that he might have moved in very different society from that of a ship's forecastle, yet perhaps in the next breath it would be replete with sailor slang and oaths. This was one.

The other, that he was a sort of leader among his four shipmates. I say four, for the reason that the five white sailors had come on board in company, while the negro, Tom, had applied personally to Captain Peterson for a berth in the Rattler after he learned her destination. The others ignored their colored companion as far as possible and seemed to regard him with a certain distrust.

“Rather a hard-looking set—all but that good-looking fellow in your watch, don't you think, sir?” queried Van, as after all was made snug for the night, one watch was sent below, while Van and Captain Peterson stood on the quarter comparing nautical notes.

“If you'd been at sea as many years as I have,” returned the captain with a rather grim smile, “you'd



think these a very fair average as sailors go nowadays. And in my way of thinking," he added, lowering his voice a little, "the good-looking chap is the worst-looking—there's an evil spirit in his eye as big as the ship's dog, to use a sailorism."

After a little further conversation Van went below for his first "four hours in," thus alternating with Captain Peterson through the twenty-four.

Now this is not a sea story, the voyage of the Rattler being simply one of the links in the marvelous chain of experiences which Vance Briscoe was destined to meet.

So it will be sufficient for me to say that with the usual alternations of storm and calm, fair winds and foul, the Rattler plowed steadily onward toward her destination.

About ten o'clock in the evening of the twenty-ninth day out from Boston, the strong breeze which had followed the schooner for most of the voyage, suddenly died out, leaving her becalmed almost exactly on the imaginary line known as the equator, some fifty miles from the mouth of the River Para.

But the important events which transpired while the schooner lay thus motionless, must be left for another chapter.



## CHAPTER II.

## A MURDEROUS PLOT.

DURING the whole voyage, Van had freely discussed the important question which was nearest Captain Peterson's heart, and had drawn from him all that Bob Martin had told concerning Itambez and the high position to which Van's uncle had attained.

And after long pondering on the subject, he had fully made up his mind to undertake the strange enterprise.

On the evening of the calm, Van was sitting on the taffrail, when Captain Peterson came on deck and called to him.

Leading the way to the cabin, the captain drew from the head of his berth a small but heavy tin trunk, which he placed on the table and unlocked. Lying on the top of its contents was a money belt of soft chamois skin, which he handed to Van, instructing him how to buckle it about him under his outside clothing.

"One never knows at sea what a day may bring forth, and it's always best to be on the safe side," he said lightly, in answer to Van's look of surprise.

The captain went on to explain that he had sold the diamond sent by Van's uncle for seven thousand dollars. In a compartment of the money belt was the important letter and a letter of credit on *El Banco Na-*



*tionale*, of Para, for a thousand dollars, to be kept as a reserve fund for emergencies. The trunk itself contained the balance of the money in gold.

Relocking the trunk, Captain Peterson turned to replace it in his berth, when a slight noise at the open skylight overhead attracted the attention of both.

Van sprang quickly up the after companionway steps, but nobody was in sight. The schooner not being under steerage way, there was no one at the wheel, and by the dazzling light of the full-orbed moon he could see the men gathered about the windlass forward.

From the long main boom, swayed sluggishly to and fro by the lazy swells, hung one of the "stops," which was dragged backward and forward across the cabin skylight.

Satisfied that this was the origin of the sound they had heard Van was about to return to the cabin, when a faint puff of air fanned his cheek.

"Come aft here whoever's wheel it is," he called. One of the crew came shuffling along the deck, Van gave him the course, the sails were trimmed, and the Rattler began to move slowly through the smooth expanse.

Returning to the cabin, Van informed Captain Peterson of the probable cause of the noise at the skylight. Then, it being his watch below, he kicked off his shoes and lay down on the outside of the berth mattress for his "four hours in," while Captain Peterson, after another glance at the coast chart, went on deck.

Almost before he knew it, Van was sound asleep.

A slight noise directly over his head, as of the sudden shuffling of feet, partly roused him after he had



slumbered rather over an hour. Raising himself on one elbow, he listened drowsily.

Nothing was heard but the monotonous creak of the main boom and the lapping sound of the water slipping past the schooner's sides. Dropping back on his pillow, Van abandoned himself again to repose.

"And *I* say the easiest course is round the Cape of Good Hope. I've had enough Cape Horn weather to last me a lifetime."

Good heavens, what was this?

The clear, well-modulated voice, slightly elevated above its usual pitch, which had suddenly aroused Van from sleep, was that of Bates, the good-looking young sailor. What was *he* doing in the Rattler's cabin? To whom could he be speaking in tones of such decisive authority?

Parting the berth curtains. Van peered quickly out.

Bending over the chart, which lay open on the table, was Bates himself, while close at his side stood Smith, the dwarfed sailor, tracing a certain course on the same chart with the end of his dirty forefinger.

With fearful forebodings of evil, Van glanced toward the gun rack about the mainmast. It was empty, and Captain Peterson's revolver was also missing from its usual place.

"Well, I think I'd orter have *some* say in the 'range-ment,'" growled Smith, "seein's I've done nigh all the work."

"*Indeed!*" sneered the other. "May I ask in what way?" he inquired with ceremonious politeness contrasting curiously with the ominous frown which darkened his features.



"How?" sullenly echoed Smith; "you know well enough 'thout askin'. Direc'ly I found out about the schooner, and that she was wantin' a crew, didn't I hunt you and the other three up, jest fer the reason we was together in t'other affair and I knowed there wasn't one of us as would stick at anything where there was a chance of makin' a big divvy——"

"That's enough—from *you*!" interrupted Bates; and Smith, who evidently held his younger companion in wholesome awe, shrank back before the latter's fierce look.

"What you've done is well enough as far as it goes," continued Bates, with an entire change of manner; "but you forget——"

"You've woke up the mate," sourly interrupted the dwarfed sailor, who, looking suddenly up, had seen Van's face looking out between the berth curtains.

"Why, so I have," said Bates in a tone of easy assurance, turning without the slightest show of embarrassment toward Van. The latter instantly slipped from the berth.

"What does this all mean?" he demanded, calling up all his self-command to meet what he instinctively knew to be a terrific emergency. "Where is Captain Peterson, and what right have you two in the cabin here?"

"I am sorry to say," coolly replied Bates, in a mocking tone, "that Captain Peterson accidentally fell over the rail and instantly sank, in the middle watch. So thinking that you, Mr. Briscoe, are rather too young for such a responsibility, I've decided to take charge myself, with the full concurrence of my four shipmates."



His four shipmates ! Then at least, Tom, the negro, was not in the plot—for that it was a plot the conversation to which Van had just listened had already assured him.

“ You are lying,” he said with a coolness which surprised even himself. “ If Captain Peterson is missing, you have murdered him and thrown his body over the side.”

“ You’ll have hard work to prove it,” returned Bates, as cool as ever.

“ Let me go on deck,” said Van, hoarsely. “ Stand out of the way, you infernal scoundrel ! ” he fiercely exclaimed, as the dwarfed sailor placed his muscular hand on the boy’s shoulder to stop him.

“ You stop where you be ! ” said Smith.

Scarcely had the words escaped his lips when Van, swinging himself free, planted a crushing blow between the sailor’s eyes, sending him headlong to the floor.

Springing past Bates, who seemed rather amused than otherwise at his companion’s discomfiture, Van ran up the companionway, while Smith, breathing out fierce oaths of vengeance, picked himself up and rushed into the little lavatory to apply water to his bruised and bleeding nose.

In a state of mind hardly to be described, the young officer glanced hastily about the deck. Captain Peterson’s familiar form was nowhere in sight, and a groan escaped Van’s lips as the truth of the assertion he had uttered in the cabin forced itself upon his mind.

The three other members of the gang of conspirators were laughing and talking loudly on the deck. They had routed out the steward, who, in a state of the most



abject terror, had set three tumblers and a bottle of brandy before them on the head of the capstan, about which the villainous trio had gathered.

With a gesture of despair, Van turned to the wheel, where the gigantic negro was standing. Tom had only just come on deck. He knew nothing of the mutiny, or of the disappearance of Captain Peterson, and did not seem to understand the situation.

As Van faced him, Tom placed his fingers on his thick lips and motioned in the direction of the open companionway, at which the voices from the cabin below were plainly discernible.

"I tell you," Bates was saying, "it *shan't* be done. The young fellow has always treated us decently, and I'm not going to have him chucked over the side, to please you or anybody else, without there's need for it."

Van had heard enough. With a sickening sensation of loathing and dread, he turned from the companionway. Oh, if he only had *some* sort of weapon!

Almost as though divining his thoughts the negro, glancing swiftly about him, placed his huge black paw into the breast of his ragged shirt, and withdrawing it quickly, thrust into Van's hand one of those clumsy yet effective weapons known as "British bulldogs."

With a thrill of joy, Van hastily concealed the pistol, the possession of which gave him a certain sense of security.

"But *you*, Tom," he whispered.

The negro grinned significantly.

"I look out for myself—don' you be 'fraid," he muttered, as Bates, followed by the dwarfed seaman, came up the companionway steps.



“I think—a—Briscoe,” began Bates, familiarly, “that under all the circumstances, you had better take your traps for’ard to the fore-castle. Mr. Smith here will act as my mate till further notice, and sleep aft in the berth you have used.

“No words,” he added, sharply, as Van began to utter an indignant protest. “I’m master of this vessel now !”

“And I’m the mate,” coarsely put in Smith, as the self-appointed captain descended to the main deck.

“Confound you,” snarled Smith, addressing Van as soon as Bates was out of hearing; “if I don’t make this here a hot ship for you after this, my name ain’t—ain’t wot it *is*,” he said, suddenly checking himself. “And you, you ugly nigger—” turning fiercely to Tom, who had taken a step forward as though in defense of Van—“none of your savage looks—git back to yer place—d’ye hear?”

Perhaps if the new mate had not attempted to enforce his authority by a blow, the remark might have passed unnoticed.

As it was, Smith had mistaken his man. For with a deep guttural utterance like that of a wild beast, the negro seized the sailor in his powerful grasp, and lifting him off his feet as though he had been a child, dashed him heavily against the lee rail.

At the same moment Bates, who had turned at the sound of the scuffle, sprang with one leap on the quarter. Seeing his trusty lieutenant lying stunned and bleeding on the deck, he drew Captain Peterson’s revolver, pointed it directly at the negro’s head, and fired !



## CHAPTER III.

## VAN'S FLIGHT FROM THE RATTLER.

Now Van's athletic training had made him a proficient in those exercises where thought, eye, and hand must move at one and the same time.

There was no opportunity for hesitation or deliberating on the right and wrong of his action.

As the new master of the Rattler leveled Captain Peterson's revolver at the negro's head, Van, wheeling like lightning, drew the weapon given him by Tom, threw it forward and pulled the trigger.

The two reports were almost simultaneous, but with very different effect.

The ball from the revolver in Bates's hand flew wide of its mark, and the weapon itself dropped to the deck. The ball from the clumsy bulldog had passed through the fleshy part of the mutineer's arm and diverted his aim.

Uttering a suppressed cry, he stepped back, a little too far. His heel caught against a ring bolt, and he fell heavily from the break of the quarter to the main deck.

Before he recovered his feet, or those on deck could overcome their utter astonishment, the quick-witted negro saw a possible chance of escape. Striding over



the prostrate form of Smith, Tom seized Van by the shoulder, while the schooner, with no one at the wheel, came flying up in the wind.

“Quick—inter de launch !” he hurriedly exclaimed, jumping at the same moment from the main channels into the towing boat.

Van seized Captain Peterson’s revolver from the deck where it had fallen, and thrusting it into his pocket, sprang at a bound, into the launch.

Slashing the painter with his sheath knife, the negro pushed the boat clear of the schooner, as the voice of Bates rose above the confusion.

“Hard over the wheel, Smith, if you’ve got sense enough left in that thick skull of yours ! Flatten in the head sheets ! Trim down the fore sheet—so—that will do ! Now, meet her with the helm !”

While he was thus thundering out order after order, Tom and Van were cutting loose the mast, sail, and rudder from their lashings under the thwarts, and in an incredibly short time the launch was running before the steady breeze.

The moon was obscured by drifting clouds, and the haze indicative of their nearness to the shore was beginning to rise from the surface of the water. But that the launch could still be seen from the Rattler’s deck was evident from the sharp fusillade which suddenly followed as the vessel wore round and started in full pursuit.

“She sail two foot to our one—not’ing sabe us now but gale ob wind, Mist’ Briscoe,” said the negro, shaking his head.

Van made no reply. He knew that if the launch was



overtaken, neither could hope for any mercy from the infuriated wretches on board the Rattler!

On flew pursuer and pursued, and as the waning moon grew dim, the flush and glow of coming dawn began lighting up sea and sky.

The schooner was now so near that escape seemed impossible, yet the launch held steadily on.

Suddenly the misshapen form of Smith, armed with one of the carbines, appeared in the bows of the schooner, now not half a cable's length astern.

Steadying himself against the fore stay, he raised the weapon to his shoulder and seemed to take careful aim.

But the anticipated shot was never fired. All at once they saw Smith drop the carbine and disappear. The sound of a sudden order was borne by the breeze to their ears, and in another moment the schooner had hauled her wind, and, with sheets flattened in, was standing off to the south and east, instead of following the launch in hot pursuit.

"What *does* it mean?" exclaimed Van, starting excitedly to his feet, but as he did so, he saw directly ahead a long line of boiling, tossing, turbulent foam!

"Breakers! *Breakers*, Tom!" he shouted in great alarm, but to his astonishment Tom steered directly toward them.

"Don' be scart, Mist' Briscoe—I pilot too many steamer round Para and Amazon to mind dem kind o' breakers," he said, as the launch went pitching and yawing directly through the creamy surges into comparatively smooth water beyond.

And then Tom went on to explain that what not only



Van but those on board the Rattler had mistaken for breaking surf was simply the outcoming flood from the mouth of the Amazon meeting, miles from the shore, with the incoming current.

Over a sea of turbid mud-colored water the launch sped on toward the land, which was now not more than forty miles distant.

It was no wonder that Van, thoroughly depressed and cast down at the sudden ending of a voyage which had promised so much sat gloomily by himself on one of the thwarts, with his face buried in his hands.

Tom seemed to accept the situation with the easy philosophy of his race.

“Six knot current wid dis spring flood,” he said as though talking to himself, “and strong trade wind ought bring us well into Para ribber by noon—den Para sixty mile further up.”

“Didn’t I hear you say something about being a pilot round these parts, Tom?” asked Van, shaking off some of his despondency as he listened to the negro’s utterance.

Yes—Tom had mentioned it. And further questioning drew from him that for two successive years, tempted by the higher wages offered him, he had been in a small steamer running on the Amazon and Para rivers.

Van’s mind was grappling with a new and sudden hope.

Exposing the money belt about his waist, he turned back the flap of one of the compartments, from which he took his uncle’s letter.

Spreading it face down on one of the thwarts, Van



pointed to the mighty Amazon, calling it by name. At this Tom's eye brightened and he nodded understandingly as tracing along with his forefinger Van indicated successively the southern branches—the Tocantins, Xingu, Tapajos and Madeira.

"Me know 'em all," said Tom, eagerly, "and here"—nearly obliterating the Uraria—"little branch wid big ribber dat comes from way off 'mong de big snow mountains, where they say big city full peoples what nebber dies, an' hab housefuls ob gol' and dimuns and sech like."

"Why hasn't any one ever tried to find this wonderful city?" asked Van with affected carelessness, though considerably exercised at hearing this rather exaggerated corroboration of what he already knew.

"Nebber can cross dem mountains," replied the negro. "Dey make big chain right roun' de city like dis—" and Tom described an irregular circle with his finger.

Further questioning showed that Tom had heard the story of Itambez, the treasure city, from a dozen different sources since he began piloting on the Amazon and its tributaries, and curiously enough it was religiously believed by all who had ever mentioned it in his hearing.

Forgetful of heat, hunger, despondency, and even for the time of the tragedy of the night, Van, returning the letter to his belt, sat buried in deep thought.

He had a bill of exchange for a thousand dollars in his possession. Tom was a river pilot equal in strength and endurance to two ordinary men.

Why could he not engage Tom to accompany him,



and undertake the expedition, despite its seeming impossibility? Others had failed, but he had promises of help from unknown sources, and apart from the possibilities of its results, the journey through an unexplored country could not fail of being fraught with exciting interest.



## CHAPTER IV.

## THE SEAL OF ITAMBEZ.

WITH wind and tide in its favor, the launch sped rapidly along the low lying southern shore of the wide Para river. It was past mid-day when on rounding an abrupt bend in the stream the city of Para came into full view.

Half an hour later, the little vessel was lying near the damp and slippery steps in the shadow of the old stone custom-house.

“Well, Mist’ Briscoe,” said the negro, standing erect in the boat and stretching his cramped limbs, while Van gazed about him in bewilderment at the abrupt transition from the solitude of the sea to the animated scene before him; “we got here—*now* what?”

“Tom,” abruptly replied Van, withdrawing his gaze from the novel scene, “how much pay do you have on board the river steamers?”

“‘Bout forty *milreis* (twenty dollars) for mont’,” was the indifferent reply.

“I’ll give you twenty-five dollars a month to go up the river with me as far as the Canuma—and perhaps further,” said Van, without going into any explanation.

“*You* goin’ up ribber, Mist’ Briscoe?” exclaimed the negro in great astonishment—“wha’ for—you hab’ no goods for trade—”



"Well," interrupted Tom, "for one thing, I want to see something of this new country, and then I've got something else in prospect that perhaps I'll tell you about later on. I'll furnish everything we want for such an undertaking," he added, as the negro stood scratching his woolly pate with an expression of almost ludicrous astonishment.

Seeing that the manly-looking sunburned young fellow before him was in earnest, Tom pursed up his thick lips and began to whistle in a thoughtful sort of way.

"Two can't get along wid dis hebbly boat noway. S'pose I 'gree to go, mebbe we can swap him for lighter one?" returned the negro, inquiringly, and Van knew that Tom would accompany him.

"Very good," he answered; and then after a little thought he went on:

"Now while I go up town and see about getting a bill of exchange cashed, you, Tom, look round and see what sort of a bargain you can drive with some of these fellows for such a boat as we want in exchange for the launch. I'll be back before very long, and then we can see about provisioning her."

"*Bueno*," was the concise response, and leaving Tom, who spoke the language with considerable fluency, to his own devices, Van ran up the custom-house steps.

So many strange and novel objects arrested his attention on the way up town, that he had barely time to get his bill of exchange cashed, before the great doors of the bank were closed for the day. Through the aid of an interpreter, Van succeeded in obtaining two Bank of England notes for fifty pounds each. These he replaced in his money belt as a reserve for future emergencies.



The remaining five hundred dollars he took partly in Mexican dollars, a little gold, and partly in the greasy looking *milreis* and half *milreis* notes which with some nickel coins constitute the ordinary currency.

Van's next act was to make his way to the principal business street, and having found a store where English in a broken form was spoken, he proceeded to buy and put on clothing better adapted to the climate than that which he had been wearing.

Returning to the pier, Van found that Tom had made good use of his time.

After considerable chaffering, he had succeeded in exchanging the launch with a Portuguese river trader for a nearly new *batelaos* about twenty-five feet long, with mast, sail and paddles, together with a charcoal brazier in a pan of sand and a few utensils of the simplest kind.

The boat was hollowed from a cedar log. It was of quite broad beam, shallow draught, having no keel, and a spoon shaped bow and stern, and was steered by a broad-bladed paddle working in a notch. Amidships was the cabin—open at both ends, with an arching roof covered with rawhide, which was perfectly watertight. Under this were kept the stores and bedding—a mosquito curtain of coarse cotton being arranged so as to cover the opening at night.

Tom had received a hundred *milreis* as "boot" between the two boats, and was immensely pleased when Van made him a present of ten *milreis* for his services in conducting the bargain. Together they returned to the business street, where the negro's advice and assistance in purchasing the needed supplies was invaluable,



to say nothing of his help in getting things at something like their approximate value from the crafty Portuguese trader.

A plentiful supply of coffee, pilot bread, sardines, onions and the various smaller groceries were obtained first of all. Next, Van succeeded in purchasing a stout double breech-loading gun for himself and a single one of the same caliber for Tom's use, with a supply of cartridges.

Some fishing tackle, matches in a watertight case, a pocket compass, a couple of hunting knives and two leather haversacks containing a few other serviceable articles were also bought. Then, having procured bedding, some needed articles of clothing, a pith helmet and a coarse straw hat for each, together with stout canvas leggins and walking shoes, Van dispatched the whole to the boat in a small cart, under the escort of Tom, while he lingered behind to make some trifling purchases.

Having finished his trading, he was making his way leisurely down the shady side of the street, and gazing at the throng of sunburned Brazilians around him, when he was accosted by a tall, powerfully built fellow, evidently an American sailor.

The man's clothes were shabby, but he had a frank and pleasant expression ; and Van, glad to recognize a fellow countryman among the crowds of foreign faces, returned his greeting not without warmth.

" I suppose you belong aboard one of the American vessels lying in the stream ? " said the sailor inquiringly, as they passed into the public square.

" Well, not exactly, " replied Van, laughing ; " though I *do* belong on board a boat lying near the custom-



house steps. But we leave Para for up river on the midnight flood." And crossing the square, the two turned down the street leading to the custom house.

"Come down and have supper aboard my boat," added Van, cordially, and from the eagerness with which the offer was accepted, he fancied the sailor had not fared very sumptuously through the day.

"Are you—is it a trading boat you speak of?" suddenly asked the stranger with ill concealed eagerness, as though a sudden thought had occurred to him.

"Why—no," replied Van, who hardly knew how to explain. "Perhaps I might call myself a sort of explorer on a small scale," he said smiling; "at least that is part of my errand up the Amazon——"

"How far up?" inquired his companion, with the same eagerness.

"Oh, nearly as far as the Madeira, evasively answered Van; "but of course it all depends how we get along, for it's a new business to me, and I've only got one other with me—a negro who used to be pilot on a river steamer."

The sailor's eyes lit up with something like hope.

"I've been ashore here over two months," he said, speaking very quickly and rather excitedly, "trying to get a chance up river to—to a certain point, and you're the first man I've met who is going above the Tocantins. Will you let me work my passage with you as far as you go?"

Van was so taken by surprise at the very unexpected question, that he did not reply at once. In fact he hardly knew what to say. There was plenty of room for a third person, and without doubt he could be of great assistance. But——



“Well, come aboard, and I’ll talk with you,” he said—for by this time they had reached the custom-house quay.

The stranger silently descended the half ruined steps behind Van, and in a few moments he was sitting in the stern with his young host. Tom filled a couple of bowls with savory soup which he had prepared over the brazier, and brought them aft.

As they progressed with the meal Van found himself becoming a good deal interested in the strange, shabby sailor. All attempts to draw him out failed. Whatever his secret, he guarded it well, and was careful not to make known why he was so anxious to get up the river. However, Van was conscious of a growing liking for him, notwithstanding his mysterious manner, and at length he decided to take him on board, to the sailor’s evident delight.

Preparations for starting were made, and as the cathedral clock rang out the hour of midnight, the little boat shot out of the bay, to take advantage of the flood tide. The broad island studded channel connecting the Para with the Amazon was threaded in safety, and on the following forenoon the light boat had fairly entered on her voyage up the mighty river.

Now Van had decided that while as first officer of the Rattler “Mr. Briscoe” was all well enough as a matter of form, he was rather too young to be thus addressed in general conversation. So he had instructed Tom to call him “Mr. Van” or “Mr. Vance,” as he pleased, and in this way the sailor himself had adopted the same title.

But it so happened that a few days after leaving Para,



Van, for the first time, brought out his substitute for a chart and laid it open before him.

“Another twenty-four hours ought to bring us into the Uraria according to my reckoning,” he said, after making a scale measurement with a strip of paper.

“And de Canuma flow inter de Uraria 'bout half way from its mouth, eh, Mist' Briscoe—I mean Mist' Vance,” responded the negro, correcting himself quickly.

“Mr.—WHO?” exclaimed the sailor, as he looked suddenly up from the gunlock he was oiling.

It was so very unusual for him to betray the slightest signs of either curiosity or surprise that Van was amazed at his excited tone, and briefly explained the matter.

The other opened his lips, but whether to comment or question is uncertain. For at the moment his gaze fell upon the back of the letter, which Van was refolding preparatory to returning it to place.

Instantly a curious ashy pallor overspread the sailor's face. Coming forward, he touched the impress of the peculiar seal on the back of the letter with a finger that trembled visibly.

“Why—what is it?” asked Van in extreme bewilderment.

Instead of answering, the sailor threw open the front of his coarse linen shirt.

With an astonishment greater than can be imagined, Van saw neatly tattooed in peculiar coloring on the sailor's brawny chest *the exact counterpart of the seal on the letter!*



## CHAPTER V.

## THE VOYAGERS ON THE RIVER.

As Van gazed in amazement at the strange marks upon the breast of the sailor, a sentence from his uncle's letter, which by this time he knew nearly by heart, recurred to his mind.

"He bears the sign of the Order whose seal is the same as that stamped upon this letter."

"Good Heavens!" he gasped; "it isn't possible—that you are Robert Martin?"

"So I was christened, but I'm so taken back as hardly to be sure who I am," was the dazed reply. "And you—your name is Briscoe," he went on. "So I suppose——"

"Read this," briefly interrupted Van, who could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes and ears. As he thus spoke he extended his uncle's missive, which Martin took in an amazement too great for words, and read from beginning to end.

"I thought I never should be surprised at anything again," said the sailor; "but this beats me out and out. Will you kind of clear it up?" he went on, staring at Van in a confused sort of way, while Tom in the stern looked from one to the other in open-eyed bewilderment.



As Van at once began a full explanation of the whole matter, Martin gradually recovered his usual quiet, self-contained manner.

“It’s all plain sailing enough now I begin to understand it,” he said, tugging thoughtfully at his heavy beard; “that is, all but this running across each other as we’ve done.”

Little by little, and rather shame-facedly, Bob Martin told the whole story. How one of the penalties of leaving Itambez was that in place of the easier route known to its head men he was compelled to make his way overland through more than a thousand miles of unexplored territory, across the Peruvian boundaries to the coast. After almost incredible privations and hardships he succeeded in reaching Callao, more dead than alive, and from thence the American consul sent him on board the ship *Springhaven*, which was loading at the Chinchas.

But when he finally reached New England, after an absence of some fifteen years, Martin found no one to welcome him at his old home on the cape. His parents were no longer living, so, drifting back to the city, he literally and figuratively fell among thieves, who managed in less than a year to get possession of the little fortune realized from the sale of his Itambez diamonds.

Then it was that he made up his mind to return to Itambez, desperate as seemed the undertaking.

“Before I left there it was predicted that I should come back sooner or later,” he said quietly; “and I knew if I could only reach Para the way would open somehow, and you see I was right.”

“As it so happened—yes,” returned Van, with an in-



credulous shoulder shrug. "Whoever made the prediction, as you call it," he went on, as Martin remained silent, "was safe enough, for if Itambez is the paradise that Uncle Richard represents, a man would naturally want to get back to it as soon as possible."

"Wait till you see for yourself," was the quiet reply, and then, though guardedly, the sailor began answering the numberless questions which Van had to ask, while Tom, who gradually seemed to comprehend something of the real drift of Van's undertaking, listened with eager attention.

"Did you ever hear my uncle express any wish to return to his own country?" asked Van among other things.

Bob Martin hesitated a moment before replying.

"If he ever hinted at anything of the kind," he finally answered, "it was entirely on account of his daughter Ninada. I think he would have liked her to have certain advantages that she can't have even in Itambez."

"His daughter!" echoed Van, in great astonishment. "Why——"

"Your uncle married one of the most beautiful women in the city, who died when Ninada was born," gravely interrupted Martin.

Here was news indeed! With an uncle and a cousin living, Van was not so alone in the world as he had thought.

"Is—is Ninada pretty?" asked Van, rather diffidently.

"She is even handsomer than her mother," returned Martin, "and as good as she is beautiful, and that's saying considerable,"



Further explanations followed. The sailor's reason for trying to reach Itambez by the river route instead of by the longer and far more dangerous overland journey was simply this :

The Canuma River, which rose among the western Cordilleras, flowed directly through the city of Itambez. Far outside the city limits it entered a canyon among the encircling mountains, and thence made its way to Canuma Lake, from which another branch flowed directly into the Uraria.

Trading boats were constantly ascending the Amazon to its junction with the Uraria, and once he got a passage thus far he felt sure of accomplishing the rest of the journey, hazardous as such an undertaking might seem.

And now their future destination, which all along had seemed to have an air of unreality, began to take more definite form in Van's mind. Thus far he had thought more of the novel experiences of the journey itself. Now his heart began to beat high with anticipation, and he became as anxious to shorten the voyage as was Martin himself.

Tom, on his own part, accepted the story of Itambez in perfect good faith. His simple and somewhat credulous nature had taken in all he had previously heard about the treasure city without the slightest shadow of hesitation.

"I termendous lucky to fall in wid you two," he gravely remarked. "'Spect I'll make er mighty good thing of it some way or oder, and any way I'se sure of my twenty-five dollars a month."

Though the three voyagers encountered the usual



discomforts incident to travel in warm climates, they endured them with considerable philosophy, as well persons might with such a goal in view as Itambez.

Occasionally a small, light draught schooner would be spoken or encountered at anchor, but after they had fairly entered the Uraria, these connecting links of civilization were left behind.

It was early morning when the light boat, swinging round a bend in the Uraria, entered the mouth of the unexplored Canuma branch.

The mist, rising from the face of the smooth stream, was shot through with golden arrows from the bow of the rising sun. There was no air stirring, so Tom and Bob were plying the paddles—the boat being kept well into the eastern shore on account of the swift current.

The scene was one of indescribable beauty. The mast was brushed by clusters of vines, full of odorous blossoms, hanging from the overarching limbs of lofty trees on the banks, which themselves were a mass of the densest foliage rising directly from the water's edge.

Everywhere grew the palm and cacao, while among the glossy banana leaves the golden fruit hung temptingly. Big blue butterflies, half as large as an ordinary palm leaf fan, danced over the river or hovered among the blossoms. Parrots and parrakeets chattered in the tree tops, lories whistled, and ducks with their young broods quacked loudly as they were disturbed by the approach of the gliding boat.

All the long day scenes of strange novelty kept presenting themselves at almost every bend and turn of the river, which, so far as is definitely known, has never



before been navigated beyond a little settlement of Mauri Indians, some twenty miles from its mouth, excepting by one or two parties of venturesome explorers.

Some distance above its mouth, the river had overflowed its banks. For miles a watery forest, or *ygapos*, as the flooded plains are termed, extended on every side. It was an easy matter to follow the river bed, but toward the close of the day a deviation was made among the tree trunks in pursuit of a wounded duck which had fallen at a discharge of Van's gun.

The mast had been unstepped on account of the difficulty of forcing the boat along among the bushy tops of the jungle brush, which rose only a short distance above the surface.

Van, sitting in the stern and holding the short steering oar, was directing the course of the boat, which Bob Martin, hidden by the cabin amidships, was paddling as directed by Tom. The negro was in the bow, reaching out with a rude substitute for a boat-hook, and trying to secure the wounded duck, which managed to keep just out of reach.

As the boat passed under the branches of a huge wild fig tree, which, matted with thick vines and creepers, stretched out in every direction for many yards, Van was conscious of a slight rustling above him.

Looking up involuntarily, he had a glimpse of an olive-hued face bending over a parting among the foliage directly above his head. Almost simultaneously two muscular hands attached to long brown sinewy arms were thrust quickly downward, and, clutching Van by either shoulder, jerked him suddenly up through the opening as easily as though he had been a child.



## CHAPTER VI.

## VAN IS TAKEN PRISONER.

“A GORILLA !” was the wild thought which flashed across Van’s mind, but before he could cry out a broad hand was clapped across his mouth, while his wrists were seized and held in a grasp like that of a vise.

But no—the dark face bending over him was that of a human being, an Indian evidently, as was the lithe dark-skinned young man who had seized and lashed his ankles together, and was pressing his whole weight upon the lower part of Van’s body, despite his frantic struggles.

The whole affair was the work of an instant, and accomplished with such silent swiftness that the boat swept on, and its occupants, both of whom were facing the bows, were utterly unconscious of what had taken place.

With a mixture of emotions impossible to describe, Van, thus rendered speechless and helpless, listened in mute despair to the sound of the receding paddle !

As his eyes accustomed themselves to the shadowy gloom caused by the dense foliage, he saw that he was extended on a platform of canes held together by twisted rushes, supported by the lowermost branches of the fig



tree, which themselves were interwoven with matted vines.

The intermediate boughs had been removed to the height of about eight feet, and the extreme ends of those above brought down in a sort of arch to the edge of the platform. Ingeniously arranged among and above them was a sloping roof of closely woven flags, quite impervious to the occasional light showers of the dry season.

At the further extremity were three grass hammocks, and a rude stone fireplace, beside which crouched a scantily attired Indian woman, whose dark eyes glanced curiously at the prisoner.

The old Indian at Van's head addressed the woman in a sharp undertone. Rising, she pulled from an overhanging branch a bright scarf of native manufacture, which she tossed to her dark-skinned companion.

In less time than I have taken to write it, the scarf was tightly drawn across Van's mouth and his wrists lashed like his ankles. Then being laid gently on a pile of jaguar skins, he had an opportunity to reflect on his serious situation, as well as to further examine the appearance of his captors.

Both the older and younger of the Indians were unlike any of those he had yet seen along the river banks where the three travelers had stopped from time to time.

They had rather pleasant, regular features of olive hue, and hair with a slight tendency to curl at the ends.

As he was attentively regarding them, the oldest one suddenly threw up his hand warningly.

Through the stillness of the nearing twilight Van heard the regular dip of paddles!

*"Van—Mr. Briscoe!"*



In vain Van writhed and struggled with his bonds, as he heard his name shouted repeatedly in Martin's powerful voice.

The older Indian, with a perfectly impassive face, drew a curious looking knife with a sharp two-edged blade from the coarse sash about his waist and gently placed its point against Van's throat.

"*Van—Mr. Briscoe!*"

Again the cry rang through the glades of the flooded forest, and was repeated by Tom with the full strength of his lungs. But Van was helpless to reply.

Nearer and nearer came the sound of the water gurgling about the bows of the boat.

At a mute sign from the elder, the young Indian took from a couple of pegs in one of the limbs overhead a lancewood bow nearly five feet in length, and, selecting an arrow almost as long from a sheaf in a wicker receptacle, silently approached the aperture in the floor through which Van had been so unceremoniously pulled.

Parting the vines beneath, he knelt at the side of the opening, and, fitting the arrow to his bowstring, seemed to hold himself in readiness.

"It was somewhere hereabouts I first looked round and saw he was gone," Van heard Bob Martin say in a voice suggestive of great anxiety.

"He mus' a' slipped ober accidental an' drowndid hisself—no oder way possible he *could* a got outer de boat so myster'ous," sadly returned the negro.

"But it would seem as though we should have heard the splash or *something*," responded Bob in troubled tones, and again he shouted Van's name, but only echoes replied.



"If Mist' Van was alive he'd answer dat for sure," said Tom. As he spoke, the boat glided so near the hiding place that the tips of one of the lower branches swept its gunwales.

Breathlessly, and in an agony of mind almost indescribable, Van saw the young Indian's eye glancing along the straight shaft, the notched end of which was being drawn slowly back.

Like a man in a terrible nightmare he could not stir hand, foot, or tongue, to warn his friends of their danger.

But the boat moved slowly on, and as the young native relaxed his bowstring Van breathed more freely.

"It's most dark," Van heard Bob saying, "and we must get back to the river bed or run the risk of getting lost in this confounded forest."

And then the voices dwindled to an indistinct murmur, and Van felt as though his last hope was gone.

As the sounds died away in the distance, the younger of the two Indians rose, and, laying aside the bow and arrow, spoke rapidly to the other, who had replaced the knife in his sash.

Then, passing behind the tree trunk, he quickly reappeared, carrying a light canoe which was made from rawhide stretched tightly over a wicker framework, and rendered impervious to the wet by a coating of mastic.

This he dropped through the opening, and lowered himself after it. The soft splash of a paddle was heard and he was gone.

His senior, with the same impassivity of face, unbound the scarf from Van's face, and unloosed the thongs at his wrists. Then he significantly touched his



knife blade as a gentle hint to his captive not to presume on his good nature.

What the possible object of this strange capture might be, Van could not for a moment imagine. He had nothing about him in the way of weapons to tempt their cupidity. The money belt worn next his skin and a stout knife in his pocket were his only possessions, excepting his wearing apparel.

Nor did the Indians seem badly disposed toward him. The woman, who had rather comely features, mixed some dough and baked it over the coals in the rude stone oven. This, with strips of dried turtle meat, was given Van to eat, followed by a refreshing draught of a thick, purplish beverage—the juice of the fruit of assai palm, as Van afterwards knew.

As darkness came on, the woman of the house took from a pannier overhead a number of small, slender, sun-dried fish not unlike the common smelt in appearance, one of which, to Van's astonishment, she proceeded to light in the embers as though it were a candle.

The curious taper burned with a clear odorless flame when thrust in the cleft of a split reed, consuming to the very tip of the tail, and lasting nearly half an hour.

Van was made to understand by signs that he was to use the jaguar skins as his bed for the night. The woman retired to one of the hammocks, while her husband, squatting silently on the platform with a long metal-tipped spear beside him, prepared to stand—or sit—guard over his captive.

That was the longest night of Van's life. Whenever he awaked from a troubled doze, it was to meet the



bright unwinking gaze of his watchful guard, who only changed his position when it was necessary to light another of his queer candles.

With daylight came a simple yet palatable breakfast of fish caught from the platform of the tree dwelling ten minutes before they were rolled in a taste of mandioca meal and laid on the glowing coals.

That Bob and the negro must have given up their search Van despondently decided as the forenoon slowly wore away, and he heard no welcome sound of paddles or voices calling his name.

Finally he abandoned the faint hopes of their return to which he had half despairingly clung. There must be only the one way in which they could account for his strange disappearance—and that the one suggested by the negro.

They would have no other resource now, except to go on toward Canuma Lake, and since morning a fresh breeze had been blowing which would send their boat flying toward her destination.

The dense foliage cut away from the interior limbs of the great fig tree to make space had been left at the extremities, so that there was no outlook whatever except by parting the leaves, and this Van did not dare to attempt.

And so the weary forenoon passed. His strange captor and his wife made but little conversation with each other, but their watchfulness never abated for a moment.

Lulled by the drowsy warmth into partial slumber, Van was reclining on his jaguar skin mat just after the noonday meal, when he was aroused by the sound of



voices talking an incomprehensible jargon directly beneath the platform.

Almost simultaneously the head and shoulders of the younger Indian appeared at the opening. A few words were exchanged between the newcomer and the others.

The thongs were loosened about Van's ankles enough to permit him to stand upright. Then by signs he was instructed to lower himself through the square aperture—which having done, Van found himself on a large raft, manned by a dozen or more Indians.

The raft itself was built of logs nearly as light as the wood of the cork tree, bound neatly and compactly together with ropes of palm fibers. At one end was a palm thatched enclosure serving as a cabin, behind which stood a tall helmsman wielding a broad bladed paddle.

It was propelled with rude oars, or, when the wind was fair, with a square sail of closely woven grass matting attached to a yard on a stumpy mast.

Whether a white captive was a novelty in the experience of this peculiar people, it was impossible for Van to determine.

The same gravity of demeanor was apparent among them as he had noticed on the face of his guard of the previous night. Nor did they seem to look at Van with curiosity. He was passed along something after the manner of a bale of goods to the little cabin astern, and gently motioned to take his seat on the fragrant dry grass which served as carpet and couch.

As the raft moved slowly out into the flooded forest, Van vainly endeavored to inquire his destination or fate.



The Indians could not or would not understand his signs. Indeed they paid but little attention to their prisoner, knowing probably that he could only escape by jumping overboard, in which case the alligators would make short work of him.

Two men pulled leisurely on either oar, while the remainder squatted in close proximity to a pile of spears, only moving when called upon to relieve the oarsmen. The spears, with heavy lancewood bows and long arrows, were their only weapons.

There was something almost appalling in their strange silence, and the personal appearance of the raftsmen was anything but prepossessing.

Each man had his head closely shaven, excepting just above the forehead and behind the ears, where the hair was allowed to grow and hang over the shoulders like a shaggy mane. Their bestial and savage look was heightened by the practice common among the Mumurus of chipping the upper and lower front teeth to a sharp point, so that they resembled saw teeth.

There was a cannibalistic suggestion in the looks of this people which was by no means pleasant. Van put the idea as far as possible from his mind, but despite his best efforts the terrible thought would come up, and it is no wonder that he gradually gave way to the deepest despondency as he realized his almost hopeless condition.



## CHAPTER VII.

## THE MUMURU VILLAGE.

As the sun disappeared behind some curiously shaped hill-tops (the first indication of a mountainous region that Van had noticed since leaving the Amazon) the raft emerged from the flooded forest into the main course of the river.

Crossing the stream at almost right angles, it was propelled into the mouth of a deep wide branch which entered the Canuma on the western side. After an hour of alternate pulling and towing the raft rounded a thickly wooded point, and touched the strand.

Forest and shore alike were wrapped in the soft impenetrable gloom of the tropics, which served to make the blazing constellations of the bluish black vault overhead shine out with double splendor.

Fire-flies sparkled through the air on every side, and occasionally the giant lantern fly whizzed past, leaving a strange phosphorescent trail as distinct as that of a passing meteor.

Scarcely was the raft made fast to a stake in the sand, when the raftsmen united their voices in a strange shrill cry. It was echoed from a short distance away.



Like magic the darkness was suddenly illumined by the flashing up of a dozen blazing bonfires within a stone's throw of the narrow beach.

Apparently fed with some resinous substance, the flames shot skyward and lit up the surroundings with startling distinctness.

Before Van's astonished and bewildered gaze, a large settlement of palm thatched houses, divided by narrow streets, extended back from the river bank into the thickly-wooded slope beyond.

Gathering about the bonfires and rushing down to meet the occupants of the raft was a tumultuous crowd of men, women, and children, of the same nationality as his captors.

Finger tips were touched, a few brief words exchanged in a subdued undertone, and then Van, as one in a dream, was escorted up from the beach by half a dozen brawny, muscular men, each armed with a spear, and bearing a shield of several thicknesses of skin stretched over an oval frame-work.

Arriving at a square building in the very center of the village, near each corner of which a smaller bonfire was burning, Van was gently urged through the doorway by a young Mumuru. The latter took up his position on the outside, near the door, while at either corner four other guards were placed.

Van's prison house seemed to be a structure some thirty feet square, built something after the primitive style of the old time log cabin, excepting that the spaces between the logs were left unchinked, presumably for the sake of air and light.

The interior was in partial darkness, till, a few mo-



ments later, a couple of Indian boys entered, each bearing an armful of short billets of pitchy wood, which they carefully deposited on the hard beaten clay floor in the center of the structure.

A lighted brand carried by one of them was applied to the pile, and it shot up at once into a white flame, which, strangely enough, gave out comparatively little heat, but an intense light.

The boys brought more wood with which to replenish the fire, and then, after stealing curious glances at the prisoner from beneath their shaggy manes, they withdrew, leaving Van to examine his surroundings at his leisure.

But—merciful heavens!—what were these staring down at him from rude shelves at the further end of his prison?

Possessed of more than ordinary courage, Van Briscoe could face a living emergency—so to speak—with tolerable coolness and composure. But the dead—

Resolutely fighting down the shuddering horror which had suddenly almost overcome him, Van walked toward the opposite side of the enclosure. There he saw, directly before him, one, two, three—twenty, in all—human heads, ranged in rows, and nearly on a level with his own!

It was a full moment before he could recover himself from the shock enough to think calmly, and then he suddenly remembered that, among other facts he had learned relating to the customs of the savage tribes in the far interior of Brazil, was their habit of embalming the heads of enemies slain in battle, after the manner of the head-hunting Bornean Dyaks.



But these two ghastly faces set apart by themselves just above a sort of square altar built of slabs of flat stone—*these* were no natives of South America—no enemies slain in battle!

Taking a burning stick from the blaze, Van stepped nearer.

The flickering flame shone directly upon the wonderfully well preserved features of a European. Blonde hair and a heavy beard were exactly as in life. Small cowry shells had been inserted into the eye sockets, giving the ghastly appearance of a man looking through half closed eyes.

The other face was that of a younger man, with a mustache. With the exception of a shriveled and leathery appearance of the skin, either one could have been recognized by any one knowing the originals in life!

From these grim objects Van transferred his gaze to the square stone structure beneath them; and as he did so, he gave a start of surprise.

Upon the flat top lay several articles which he at once conjectured to have belonged to the white victims whose embalmed heads were placed directly above them.

A pocket revolver of English make, the cylinder of which contained four empty shells and one still loaded, in itself suggested a tragic story. Near it lay a box half full of cartridges belonging to the weapon, and, in a little pile by themselves, were nearly fifty large brass shells such as are used with the heaviest kind of breech-loading rifles. A bunch of keys, a watertight metal matchbox containing wax matches, a



silver drinking cup and a small pocket compass, were placed symmetrically at the several four corners of the structure. In the middle lay the leather cover and fly leaf of what had been a pocket notebook.

On the latter was written as follows :

“Journal of a trip up the Amazon and interior exploration, by Edward Bampton and Carl Schmidt. Left Rio Janeiro Jan. 3, 1875.”

It was all plain enough to Van. The two explorers had fallen victims to the barbarous tribe whose prisoner he himself was. Perhaps these terribly suggestive relics of humanity were intended as object lessons to teach him his own fate.

That the articles above enumerated were evidently regarded with a sort of superstitious reverence, and their use not understood by the Mumurus, Van readily conjectured.

They certainly knew nothing of firearms, or they would not have placed their prisoner where he could secure such a priceless treasure as the revolver, which, barring a little rust, was in perfect order.

He lost no time in appropriating it, and having replaced the empty shells with loaded ones, pocketed the pistol and the remaining cartridges with feelings of relief too great for utterance. The compass, cup and matchbox he also took, together with the leaf of the notebook telling its sad story.

As Van was turning away, a sudden thought occurred to him.

If, as he had conjectured, the Indians knew nothing



of the power of firearms, how would it do to experiment a little?

Taking a handful of the large cartridges, he replenished his own fire and glanced out between the logs.

The four separate fires at the four corners of his prison house were burning brightly, and near each was a tall guard with shield and spear. About the fire stood little knots of natives, occasionally exchanging a few words regarding their new prisoner—at least, so Van imagined.

The young Indian stood motionless by the door, leaning on his spear—his dark eyes curiously regarding Van, whose every movement could be seen by the light of the blaze within.

Now Van had noticed upon entering that the rude substitute for a door was only fastened by a twisted withe. The Mumurus probably considered that the prisoner's safety was guaranteed by the presence and watchfulness of five armed guards, rather than by any restraint of bolts and bars.

"If I could only get him away from in front of the door just for a moment!" Van thought.

Moving across the enclosure, he leaned up against the logs, and, reaching one arm through as far as possible, tossed the handful of cartridges directly into the heart of the blazing bonfire, not five feet distant from the corner of the building.

As he had anticipated, the act was seen by his sharp-eyed guardians. With those immediately surrounding the fire, the young Indian bent eagerly over it to see what possible charm the white prisoner might be attempting.

They discovered almost immediately. As Van dis-



creetly retreated to the opposite side, a sudden loud explosion, closely followed by another and another, sent embers and ashes flying in the air!

And not only that. The simultaneous report also sent five shrieking Indians right and left—one with a bullet through his leg from an exploded cartridge—roused up half the village, and, best result of all, caused the young Mumuru before Van's prison door to drop his spear in a perfect frenzy of fright and bolt in the opposite direction like a deer!

This was Van's opportunity! Throwing his weight against the inside of the door, the withe broke like packthread, and he was outside in a twinkling.

Snatching the spear from the ground, Van made a break through the darkness, with no more definite idea than to lose himself in the thick growth behind the village.

But half a dozen forms, which seemed to rise out of the earth, confronted him, while following the sharp twang of a bowstring came the whiz of an arrow within an inch of his head.

At the same moment a tall Indian, uttering a yell which would have done credit to an Apache, sprang forward to clutch the escaping prisoner.



## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE FLIGHT AND THE PURSUIT.

It was simply a matter of life and death with Van Briscoe, and self-preservation is a law of nature.

Launching the spear at his would-be assailant—with a very marked result, to judge by the cry of pain that followed—Van wheeled in his tracks and fled in an opposite direction.

By this time the entire village was in commotion. Torches flashed hither and thither—loud and excited voices were heard, and for once at least the usually apathetic *Mumurus*, disappointed of another white man's head to add to their collection, were in a high state of excitement.

Van, who had completely lost his bearings, sped on through the darkness, once or twice running into a recently roused Indian. Without stopping to apologize he kept on in his flight.

But the Indians against whom he stumbled quickly gave the alarm, and in a moment or two the hue and cry was turned in the direction he had taken. A dozen torches, waving wildly in the air, moved swiftly toward him. As his eyes became a little accustomed to the darkness, Van saw that his aimless flight had brought



him to the bank of the wide stream where the raft was moored.

Suddenly the remembrance of the little canoe came to his mind.

Springing upon the raft, Van ran swiftly over the logs to the further end, just as a howling mob came rushing down to the beach.

Luckily for Van, he had several times adventured himself in a canvas canoe owned by one of the St. Mary's boys. So, despite the urgent need of haste, he took time to place himself in the bottom of the frail craft with due caution. Then, casting loose the raw-hide painter, he pushed off.

And not a second too soon. A wild-eyed, half-naked Mumuru, waving a flaming torch above his head, dashed out on the raft. He was closely followed by another, who, dropping on one knee, fitted an arrow to the bowstring.

The glaring light of the torch clearly revealed the dark savage faces and gleaming white teeth of his enemies. As the eye of the kneeling Indian glittered along the slender shaft, Van, who had no other resource, drew the revolver and fired. A yell of terror attested to the result of the hasty aim, and seizing the paddle Van sent the light canoe spinning out into the darkness. He had gained at least temporary safety, for the deep gloom that overhung the wooded banks of the river concealed him from his enemies.

He heard the whizzing of arrows and the soft "plash" as they fell on the water about the canoe, but in another moment he had shot round the bend in the stream.



Van suffered his boat to drift downward with the current, keeping as nearly as possible in the middle of the stream, whose densely wooded shores, indistinctly seen through the gloom, swept past with considerable rapidity.

In less than half an hour he had reached the junction of the smaller creek with the Canuma. Drawing the canoe under the overhanging branches of an immense cluster of tree ferns, he "tied up" till morning—it being impossible to get further in the darkness.

Laying himself at uneasy length in the canoe bottom, Van drew a long breath. For the first time since his escape he had leisure for connected thought.

What step to take next did not trouble his mind. There was only one thing that he *could* do—that being to go forward. He could not hope to overtake Bob Martin and Tom unless they had been delayed in some way, yet he could reach Canuma Lake with ordinary good fortune. Once there, unless the whole thing was a myth, he would find those who would help him—or in the words of his uncle Richard's message—"whoever shall reach Canuma Lake, bringing this letter which has the imprint of the royal seal, has no further difficulty. His or their responsibility ceases, and such person or persons are taken in charge by others."

Revolving these thoughts, together with confused memories of the startling events of the past twenty-four hours, in his mind, Van fell fast asleep.

He had resolved to wake with the first gleam of day. But into his leafy, shaded retreat, neither the glimmer of dawn nor the rays of sunrise could penetrate, and the sun itself was two hours high before Van opened



his eyes with a drowsily vague idea that he was stretched in a coffin.

Remembering where he was, he was carefully standing upright in the bottom of the little craft, and looking around him, when a long double end canoe, manned by more than a dozen Mumurus, swept swiftly past his hiding-place.

Pausing for a moment at the mouth of the stream, they held a brief consultation—some pointing up the Canuma, others down, or in the direction from which Van and his companions had previously come.

To Van's great delight, the latter course was finally decided upon, and in another moment his enemies were hidden from view by a bend in the river.

Leaving the leafy covert, with a heart full of thankfulness, Van took the opposite direction, and after two hours of steady paddling, ran the canoe ashore in a little cove, with a view of hunting up breakfast.

Here he began to notice an entire change in the landscape and surrounding scenery. The palms, cacaos, and white trunked rubber trees were replaced by an entirely new and strange growth.

There was an entire lack of underbrush, and from the river banks long reaches of grass-covered plains stretched out for countless miles—an immense unfenced pasture for thousands upon thousands of wild cattle.

Another thing that Van noticed as he stepped ashore was the seeming absence of fear on the part of the bird and animal kingdom.

Humming birds of every conceivable brilliant hue flashed past him within reach and poised themselves



above the gaudy passion vines and strangely shaped orchid blossoms. A large white cockatoo with a yellow crest eyed Van with thoughtful contemplation from a mimosa tree a couple of yards away. And a troop of diminutive monkeys with ludicrous baby faces perched themselves in a row on a fallen tree trunk, like the "ten little Injuns sitting in a line," and watched him in silent curiosity.

A few moments later Van knocked over a wild peacock with a shot from his revolver. At the report the birds took flight, while the monkeys fled shrieking with affright, and he experienced a half guilty feeling at having thus disturbed the peace of this primitive solitude.

While he was waiting for the fire he had kindled to burn up, Van cut from the rawhide painter of the canoe a long slender strip. Tying a bit of the flesh of the slain peacock to one end, he drew in a dozen or more large fish as fast as he could throw them ashore.

Making a paste of clay he rolled each one therein, and then buried them in the embers. The fowl he roasted after a rude fashion over the fire, and only for lack of that simple yet almost indispensable seasoning—salt—Van would have made a most enjoyable breakfast.

As it was, his hunger was satisfied, and having wrapped the fragments left over in a banana leaf, which he placed in the canoe, he made a brief reference to his chart.

At a rough estimate, he judged Canuma Lake not to be over a hundred miles, or less than three days' journey, distant. Greatly encouraged, he started on again.



But now began by far the most difficult part of the voyage. The river had narrowed from nearly a mile in width to less than half that distance, and the current increased in strength, while at short intervals it was broken by dangerous rapids and waterfalls.

Luckily for Van his canoe did not weigh much more than twenty-five pounds, so that when he reached places where navigation was an impossibility, he ran the little craft ashore. Then, shouldering it, he made his way as best he could around the fall or rapid to the smoother water above.

But the difficulties thus encountered seemed insurmountable at times, and only that turning back meant almost certain death in one form or another, Van would more than once have given up in despair.

His clothing was nearly reduced to rags—his stout walking shoes were full of holes, and though the mosquito districts were left behind the bites of tiny red ants and other tormenting insects almost drove him frantic.

He had to force his way through nearly impenetrable ravines into which the light of day apparently had never shone, and over marshes where the atmosphere reeked with foul miasmas from the rotting vegetation and slimy pools on every hand.

Van knew that his late companions must be worse off than himself. Their boat was far too heavy for a portage or "carry," and they must have abandoned her, to pursue their journey entirely by land on one side of the river or the other, encumbered by the weight of their guns and such necessities as they felt obliged to take.

But he listened in vain for the distant report of fire-





THE EXACT COUNTERPART OF THE SEAL UPON THE LETTER FROM THE UNKNOWN LAND.







arms, and equally in vain did he strain his gaze hoping to see some far away column of smoke indicating their camp fire.

The long stretches he was enabled to make in his canoe, in the slack of comparatively smooth water between the irregular occurrence of rapids and falls, served to give his blistered and aching feet a little rest. But though he fought desperately against the feeling, Van could not but know that he was growing weaker every day from fatigue and lack of proper food.

He had grown to fairly loathe the scorched flesh of the wild fowl which he shot with his revolver from time to time, and even preferred the rather rancid taste of the turtles' eggs that he found in abundance in the sandy patches along the shore.

Occasionally Van was lucky enough to discover an anthill whose original occupants had been evicted by a swarm of small stingless black bees. The honey, instead of being stored in comb cells, was enclosed in perfectly round balls of black wax one and two inches in diameter. This Van found very delicious.

But three and even four days had passed, yet he could see no signs of an approach to the looked-for lake. On the morning of the fifth day Van woke from unrestful night's slumber in his canoe, with every bone in his body aching terribly, and a sensation as though a band of red hot iron were welded about his forehead. Cold chills ran over him from time to time, succeeded by intervals of heat in which he seemed to be burning up.

But the will power is a wonderful factor in sickness. Had Van been differently circumstanced, he would



have dosed himself with quinine, and given himself up to the fever of the Brazilian interior.

As it was, grimly telling himself that he couldn't afford to be sick, he swallowed a mouthful or two of turtle meat crisped over the coals, washed it down with a draught of river water, and paddled out into the stream.

Fortunately he had reached a comparatively easy stretch with a sluggish current, and weak as were the strokes of his paddles, Van was enabled to make considerable headway. Then, too, the sun was partly veiled in a soft misty haze not unlike that of a New England October, and a cooling breeze blew up the river, tempering the intense heat.

At some little distance ahead Van saw in the very middle of the stream a tall basaltic rock or column, which at a nearer approach he discovered to be of a dull reddish color not unlike porphyry. Around its base the river ran with considerable force, yet so hard was the formation that there was not the least appearance of its having been worn by the action of the water.



## CHAPTER IX.

## DRAWING NEARER TO ITAMBEZ.

WHEN nearly opposite the column, Van noticed with surprise that the surface was graven in places by the hand of man.

There were strange hieroglyphics in regular rotation, and not entirely unlike the pictures he had seen of those found among the ruins in Yucatan and Mexico.

But conceive his wondering amazement when a nearer approach showed on the front of the column the device or insignia of the serpent encircling the hand holding a lighted torch, deeply cut on the front of the rock, in such heroic size that it could be seen from either bank of the river.

For the moment Van forgot his privation, hunger, aches and pains.

Here was at last a convincing proof that admitted of no question as to the reality of the province he was seeking—a mark, perhaps, of the beginning of the boundaries of Itambezi the treasure land!

Above the sculptured pillar the river bent abruptly to the west, and the tall forest on either hand gave place to a lower growth. And as Van's canoe rounded the green curve, his heart gave another great throb of joy.

Outlined against the distant horizon were the irregular



snow-crested summits of a far reaching mountain range, whose dimly seen slopes were veiled in misty tints of purple and blue. And Van did not need to refer to the letter chart to know that these were the mighty Cordilleras which encircled the sought for province and city of Itambez. They were the mountains among which was the canyon through which flowed the very river whose course he was following.

As nearly as he could judge they were from forty to fifty miles distant, though in reality—as he afterward knew—they were much further.

The roar of a waterfall beyond a turn in the river warned Van that another portage was before him. With anything but cheerful anticipations of a two or three hours' tramp through marsh and morass, entangling creepers and forests strewn with rolling tree trunks, Van paddled ashore at a convenient landing place, and lifting the canoe, which seemed to weigh far more than it had ever done, he took up his line of march along the river bank.

With aching head and dizzy brain, Van staggered on, thankful to find that it was comparatively easy walking owing to the sudden absence of underbrush.

Lofty trees different in size and shape from any he had seen, giving cooling shade, and soft rich grass, grateful to his tired feet, invited him to rest.

Putting down the canoe with a sigh of relief, he dropped beside it, and languidly wiped the streaming perspiration from his face with a handful of leaves.

The breeze died away as suddenly as it sprang up, and the hot, suffocating sultriness was almost unendurable.



Thicker and thicker grew the hazy atmosphere, yet there were no gathering storm clouds, neither the distant signal of thunder.

A strange and unearthly stillness was brooding over the face of nature. The parrots and lories had ceased their perpetual chatter of love or warfare in the tree tops. The distant bellowing of howling monkeys, which can be heard almost any hour of the twenty-four, had died into silence. Even the roar of the far off waterfall had a curiously subdued sound—or so at least it seemed to Van's overwrought and excited nerves.

"If there's going to be a thunder tempest I ought to be looking for a place of shelter," he told himself. Yet he could see no chance of cover excepting the trees themselves, and a tall tree is hardly a safe refuge in a tropic thunder shower.

A deep yet distant rumble, which, strangely enough, seemed to come from beneath rather than overhead, reached Van's ears. Still there was no heavy gloom, such as generally presages the thunder storm.

Again and again he heard the sound, sometimes protracted, sometimes in volleys like distant artillery.

If he had been almost anywhere excepting in the heart of an unexplored tropical country, Van might have thought a battle was going on miles away. As it was, he hardly knew *what* to think.

Suddenly, a sullen roar, that came from the very bowels of the earth, almost caused his closely cut hair to erect itself like the often quoted quills of the fretful porcupine.

According to the brief record I find in Van's notebook, there is no such terrifying sound in nature as that



which he then heard. And when, a second later, he felt the solid ground shaken to and fro, and rolling him from side to side as though he were the merest atom, a sickening sensation of fear took possession of him.

Again that awful rumble, a thousandfold louder and deeper! As he reeled to his feet to fly—whither, he did not know—Van was thrown violently down.

Before he could rise, there was a different motion—a direct upheaval—and Van mechanically clutched at the short grass as though to hold himself down.

Then a third rumble came, but died away in an indistinct muttering. The ground jarred slightly, as though shuddering at the previous throes, and gradually Van began to realize that the earthquake had spent its force.

Whether it was the cause or not of the obscuring of the sun, Van noticed that, as the face of nature regained its wonted composure, the air was filled with a fine; almost impalpable, grayish white dust, which slowly settled down and completely hid the green of grass and foliage, producing a most singular effect on the surrounding landscape.

And this it was which suggested to him that a volcanic eruption had taken place not many miles away. And what more natural to suppose than that the volcano itself was one of the mighty peaks which overtopped the province and city of Itambez?

In the tropics the recovery from almost every convulsion of nature is strangely sudden.

Ten minutes after the last shock, the birds and animals had resumed their wonted ways.

Bright colored lizards from an inch to a foot in length



scuttled through the grass at Van's feet; squirrels chattered in the trees, and a pure white monkey made impudent grimaces in his very face. Feeling sick and faint, he dragged himself to the shelter of a mimosa bush, and tried to collect his scattered senses.

A rustling in the underbrush, and the sharp rattle of claws against a neighboring tree trunk, arrested his attention. With an effort, Van languidly raised his head from the green sward.

A thrill of fear, partly due to his strained nerves, passed over him as a pair of glittering yellowish green eye-balls met his own, and he saw, crouching on the limb of a wide spreading tree, not fifteen feet away, a spotted jaguar, or tiger cat, as large as a half grown leopard, and fully as dangerous.

As though fixed in his place by that strange fascination with which the serpent charms the bird, Van's faculties seemed for the moment to be perfectly benumbed, and he sat spell-bound and motionless.

He forgot that in his pocket was a loaded weapon. Indeed, as he has since said, he thinks his brain was temporarily paralyzed—if such a thing be possible.

The lithe, long-limbed animal seemed drawing itself together for the expected spring. Its tail moved gently from side to side, as you may have seen a cat preparing to pounce upon a luckless mouse.

A sound, which Van instinctively knew to be the twang of a bowstring, broke the stillness of the drowsy atmosphere.

Simultaneous with the sound, something whistled through the air from behind the thicket, near which Van was reclining.



The jaguar, snarling fiercely, threw its graceful head backwards, and bit savagely at the shaft of an arrow imbedded in its shoulder.

“Twang,” went another bowstring, and a feathered shaft buried itself between the animal’s ribs.

Another and another followed in quick succession. The snarls of the savage animal, whose attention was now diverted from its prey, were changed to moans of pain.

All at once its claws began slipping from the smooth bark. Catching convulsively at leaves and twigs in its descent, the jaguar fell to the ground—a convulsive quiver ran through its frame, and the limbs dropped limply on one side—the tiger cat was dead!

And now occurred a strange thing. A bareheaded boy of eight or ten years of age—or thus it seemed to Van—wearing a sleeveless, short-skirted shirt over loose white breeches reaching to the knee, came running swiftly over the green sward in the direction of the fallen animal. He was followed by another and another, till more than twenty had clustered about it.

None of them seemed to notice Van, who himself was not quite sure but the whole thing was part of a sort of temporary delirium. He lay reclining on one elbow, half hidden by a mimosa bush, feeling his former symptoms of lassitude and pain coming on.

As nearly as he could tell from where he lay, there was hardly an inch of difference in the hunters’ height, which at most was little more than four feet.

“What next?” muttered Van, rubbing his eyes; “do the people in this part of the world send children out hunting tiger cats?”



For all were armed—some with bows and arrows as long as themselves, and others with feathered lances.

Van could hear their voices—proportioned to their tiny frames—in animated discussion over the dead jaguar. And then an involuntary exclamation, suddenly forced from his lips by the strange darting pains through his back and loins, drew all eyes toward himself.

That the fiend of fever had him in his clutches Van was fully assured. For as he dropped back on the grass, he was no longer Van Briscoe, but by some strange metamorphosis he had been changed into one Gulliver among the people of Lilliput !

These were not boys, but tiny bearded and mustached men of diminutive though perfect proportions, who quickly surrounded him. Thus much he made sure, before his heavy eyes fell, and the terrible stupor crept slowly but surely over his brain.

He even felt that they were binding him hand and foot, and then was conscious that his revolver, the pocket compass, matchsafe and his knife were taken from different parts of his person.

But when Van's shirt was rudely torn open in front, and small hands explored the compartments of the money belt about his waist, he made one tremendous effort, and, opening his eyes, vainly struggled with his bonds.

Whether it was part of his delirium or not, Van has never been perfectly sure. But as nearly as he can remember, he was conscious that a sudden silence had fallen upon the Lilliputian throng.

One of their number held in his small hands the letter he had taken from Van's money belt. Raising it



above his head, he seemed to point to the imprint of the seal.

Then, in the twinkling of an eye, his bonds were severed. Gentle hands raised his head, and questions in an unknown tongue were uttered in his ear, but all in vain. The deathlike torpor he had first felt began to return—he shivered convulsively—there was a sound as of something like the discharges from a galvanic jar snapping in his head, and then Van Briscoe became mercifully unconscious.



## CHAPTER X.

## CANUMA LAKE.

WHEN Van Briscoe woke to consciousness his head was not very clear regarding what had happened to him, or how it was that he found himself lying in a very comfortable grass hammock, which was swinging easily to and fro through no volition on his own part.

He recalled the sensations of the earthquake shock, and his subsequent escape from the threatened attack of the jaguar. Then in immediate connection came his singular vision of the Lilliputian men.

Raising his head, which felt light and dizzy, Van looked curiously about him.

The hammock was swung from the opposite posts in a large airy structure. One side of this was open, admitting air and light, and affording an uninterrupted view of a number of unusually small, neatly built huts, with conical tops skillfully thatched with rushes, held in place by cords of twisted grass.

The walls, like those of the larger structure in which he was domiciled, were of stout, upright canes, wattled with willow withes and coarse grass. And sitting under the shade of broad leafed trees, whose foliage hardly admitted the sun's rays were groups of the little men



and women whom he had thought of as part of his delirium.

And as little by little the mists cleared away from his mind, Van called up certain things he had read in books of travel regarding races of small people which have been mentioned by various explorers.

As, for example, the inhabitants of the Andaman Islands, whose stature seldom exceeds four feet five, while the average is but little over four feet; and the pigmy people known to exist in the far interior of Central Africa, as also another distinct race in the unexplored regions of India.

So as he watched the movements of those under his own observation. Van's first bewilderment gave place to a sort of languid interest, particularly as he noticed that both males and females, as well as the tiny children playing about the grass, had pleasant, regular features, not unlike those of the true creole with jetty black hair and eyes.

Instinctively, as the motion of his hammock suddenly ceased, he turned his eyes inward.

And as they fell upon the motive power which had been swinging his hammock, he laughed outright.

A large white monkey, of the Albino tribe peculiar to Brazil, was squatted on the cane flooring of the hut, holding one end of a cord attached to Van's hammock between its paws. Overcome by the warmth, Jocko had dropped into a short drowse, and was nodding like a Chinese mandarin.

Suddenly a newcomer appeared—whether woman or young girl Van could not at first determine. She was not more than four feet high, but admirably propor-



tioned, with the tiniest hands and feet imaginable, and a profusion of straight silky black hair flowing unconfined over the back of her simple attire, which consisted of a sort of waist and short skirt of native cloth.

The small female's first and essentially feminine act was to box the monkey's ears, thereby awaking him to a sense of neglected duties.

And then, as her bright eyes met Van's a pleasant smile crossed her infantile features, saying as plainly as words could speak :

“ Ah, you're better—that's well ! ”

In another moment she had disappeared through the door frame (door there was none), returning almost instantly, holding a small jar of porous clay in her tiny hands.

Standing on tiptoe beside the hammock, she held the jar to Van's lips, signing him to drink the contents. It was palm wine in which had been stirred bruised leaves of some herb. Though slightly bitter, the draught was delightfully cool and refreshing and Van swallowed it to the last drop.

“ Why, I feel better already,” he exclaimed, forgetting that he was speaking in an unknown tongue. But his voice, smile, and accompanying action of sitting upright in the hammock, made his meaning plain to the quick-witted little woman. She smiled approvingly, and in a clear, birdlike voice called out something intended for some one outside of the dwelling.

Immediately one of the small masculines entered, who, as Van judged from something in his simple attire a trifle superior to that of his fellows, might be a sort of head man among them.



In his hands he held the letter taken from Van's belt. This he pressed to his forehead, making a sort of obeisance. Then, giving it back to Van, he pointed with one finger in the direction which from the position of the sun Van judged to be the south, at the same time glancing with a look of intelligent inquiry into the young fellow's face.

Returning the letter to its receptacle, Van nodded emphatically. Then, not without effort, he rose from the hammock, and, in obedience to a deferential gesture from the little man, followed him into the open air.

The Pocotas, as this strange race is called by the Brazilians, seemed remarkably free from the unpleasant inquisitiveness characterizing semi civilized people. True, Van was regarded with very evident curiosity, yet all held themselves at a respectful distance, as seating himself under a wide spreading tree, he awaited with considerable interest the result of a prolonged conference between the head man of the Pocotas and a number who had gathered about him.

All Van's unpleasant sensations of the previous day had passed away. He no longer alternately shivered and burned, while the pain had entirely left his head. And this he attributed to the effect of some sort of potent medicine, which, he dimly remembered, had been forced between his lips at intervals during the night.

A curiously carved calabash, containing fowl prepared with rice and highly seasoned with red pepper, was placed before him, together with a spoon neatly fashioned from tortoise shell. And when Van handed the bowl back to the little attendant it was empty.

Meanwhile the consultation had ended. At a sign



from the diminutive chief, one of the men returned to Van the compass, match-box, cup, revolver, pistol and cartridges taken from him the afternoon before, but it was very evident that the Pocotas, who eyed them with a sort of respectful awe, had no conception of their use.

Then, followed at a little distance by almost the entire population, Van was guided to the river banks but a pistol shot distant.

Here he found his canoe. In the bow was a wicker basket full of food, while beside it was a large jar of porous clay containing a preparation not unlike lemonade.

That the Pocotas were aware of Van's destination was very evident from what had passed. How much more they knew of the province on the very outskirts of which their own little tribe were suffered to dwell, Van could form no idea further than to judge by certain indications that they held the people of Itambezi in great awe.

Pointing up the river, the Pocota chief waved his hand in a circular sweep which Van understood to mean Canuma Lake. Next he held up two fingers, and this, Van felt quite sure, indicated two days' journey, as the stock of provisions which had been provided were sufficient to last about that time.

His canoe was carefully deposited in the water, and Van shook hands with a number of the friendly little people who pressed forward to bid him farewell.

And then, taking his place in the bottom of the Mumuru canoe, which had done him such good service, Van resumed his paddle and his journey, quickly losing sight of his kindly entertainers around one of the frequent bends in the river.



And now neither rapids or waterfalls were encountered. Again the river widened, and the sluggish current was easily stemmed. Feeling better, stronger, and even light-hearted, Van sent his little craft skimming around with a strange thrill of exultation at the thought that he, a New England boy, was probably the first white man who had ever penetrated so far into these mysterious wilds.

Nearer and with increasing grandeur loomed up the mighty mountain ranges, which, with the exception of the Andes, are perhaps the highest on the continent.

Their crests and summits, covered with perpetual snows, were hidden among the clouds. Lower down began lines of green, deepening into stronger tints of olive, with here and there vast slopes and granite peaks rising in a thousand irregular and fantastic shapes.

Along the river banks from time to time Van caught glimpses of massive ruins, which were perhaps the remains of cities built by the people of whom the most ancient history has no record; a race who ruled and reigned several thousands of years—so antiquarians assert—before the era of the Incas or the time of the Aztecs.

Still on through the long day, which was followed by a night of refreshing slumber on the soft grass, a little back from the river's edge, undisturbed by fears of the dampness and miasmatic vapors of the lower lands.

Another day and another night, and then as the green river banks began to crimson in the rays of a morning sun, which turned the drops of dew on fern and flower into precious gems, Van saw before him the longed-for Lake Canuma.



No wonder that involuntarily suspending his paddle, he sat for one brief moment almost holding his breath with delight.

Spreading far and wide on either hand, the smooth surface had the dull luster of gold in the sunbeams. It was flecked here and there by little patches of mist, that drifting asunder disclosed small islands thickly covered with foliage. Herons and ibis, curlews and kingfishers skimmed across the crystal expanse in every direction, while the air around was resonant with the chatter of parakeets and the twittering of smaller birds of gorgeous plumage.

On every side grew clusters of strange aquatic plants, and wonderful pinkish white water-lilies, with a leaf six and even eight feet in diameter, which, floating on the surface, afforded a resting-place to innumerable small water-fowl.

As the mists rose and dispersed Van saw, a little distance ahead, an island of considerable size, rising to some height from the water's edge. Its top was crowned by the white walls of what seemed to be a ruined temple, and all at once Van's heart gave a great throb of expectancy!

For, clustered on the summit of the ruin, as though it were a watch tower, he made out a group of men. He intuitively felt that these were they who should guide him to the province and city of Itambez.



## CHAPTER XL

## THE LAST STAGE OF THE JOURNEY.

WERE Martin and Tom among them? This, the uppermost thought in Van's mind, was intensified with every stroke of the paddle which sent his little canoe swiftly onward toward the island shores.

He saw that the watchers had suddenly disappeared from the walls of the ruin, and were hurrying down the hill. At the water's edge, to his great astonishment, Van now discerned a massive stone pier, which though evidently of great antiquity, seemed, excepting for a few broken fractures across its face, to be in perfect preservation.

But he had no time for closer examination. Surely—yes it *was*, Martin's tall form followed by the negro Tom, pressing on a little in advance of a dozen men, who were walking rapidly toward a broad flight of stone steps at one side of the pier.

Springing from the canoe, Van silently grasped in turn Martin's muscular hand and the big black paw of the negro, whose mouth was expanded into a wide grin of delight.

"Thought you was drowned for sure, Mist' Briscoe," he exclaimed gleefully; "but dem yere pussons"—indi-



cating the group who had halted a little in the rear, "says no such t'ing—but you was boun' to come anyhow."

"But, in the name of all that's wonderful, Mr. Briscoe, tell us where you disappeared so suddenly, and how," said Bob Martin, eagerly. Van explained in a few brief words, interrupted now and then by an astonished exclamation from his hearers.

Their own story was soon told. As Van had conjectured, they abandoned the boat at the beginning of the rapids, and made their way along the eastern bank of the river, meeting with hardships and privations similar to those encountered by Van, besides—as Tom expressed it—being scared out of a year's growth by the shock of the earthquake.

A runner from Itambez had met them on their arrival on the lake shore a couple of days before. He had brought a message to the lake dwellers, who were subjects of Itambezi, though an inferior race of people.

In effect this message was that the wise men of the city had announced the coming of strangers—three in number—whose arrival at Canuma Lake was to be watched for, after which they were to be guided safely to the city.

"I knew," said Bob Martin with a simple earnestness contrasting strongly with Van's half incredulous smile, "that if the wise men had said that three strangers were coming, then you, Mr. Briscoe, must be all safe, and would put in an appearance sooner or later. I tell you it took a big weight from my mind."

While they had been talking, the lake dwellers, who were not unlike the Mumuru Indians in feature, though of much lighter hue, had brought a large raft to the stone



steps, where they stood respectfully waiting instructions.

They were stolid, uninteresting looking men, wearing only short breeches of linen or tow reaching to the knee, without any covering for the upper part of the person. Tattooed on the broad chest of each was the familiar device so often referred to.

Very different in looks and dress was the Itambez runner, even though he by no means represented the higher types of his people. He had regular and expressive features, tanned by contact with sun and wind. His hair, unlike that of the lake dwellers, or Pescados, as they are called, was cut short to a well shaped head, while his dress consisted of a light, sleeveless tunic, and sandals of dressed hide, in addition to the short trousers worn by the others.

So attired—as Martin told Van—the runner, who acted as a courier to convey important messages from one part of the province to another, could cover from forty to fifty miles between sun and sun.

Martin addressed the latter in his own language, and he in turn gave some command to the Pescados. The entire party then embarked on the raft, which was rigged with mast and sail, and an hour later were safely deposited at the opposite end of the lake, near the mouth of the Canuma river, which flowed into it from the canyon of the Cordilleras.

Here was a village of neatly built wooden dwellings, raised some six to ten feet above the surface of the lake on cedar pilings.

Every house had its canoe or raft fastened beneath it, while a platform that could be removed at pleasure connected one dwelling with another, and all with the shore.



At the largest of the houses the three sat down to an appetizing meal of fried fish from the lake. Then began the last part of the journey to Itambez.

Four of the Pescados went ahead, clearing the way through the matted underbrush and vines by means of a heavy knife like an elongated cleaver.

The remainder, who were armed with bows and arrows, acted both as escort and burden-bearers—provisions for a three days' journey being taken.

Ascending a vast extent of table land, where few trees were growing, they took their way due south, following the course of the river, which flowed below in a deep hollow between the foothills.

Long grass, cactus and tangled lianas impeded the way, and without the knives it would have been an impossibility to have proceeded. But so wonderfully grand was the scenery of the mountains, whose base they were slowly nearing, that these minor discomforts were disregarded.

Above the majestic peaks one rose pre-eminent; and, unlike its fellows, the snow-strewn summit was blackened and streaked in great areas, while mingling with the clouds about the truncated cone was a murky thread of smoke, which, like the guide established for the Israelites, was a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

For this was the volcanic peak called Escomada—"the cone of flame"—whose internal fires had been for centuries smouldering in the heart of the mountain.

But for the past year slight eruptions had taken place, and the blackening of the snow, which Van had noticed, was produced by the intense heat, though no lava had overflowed the crater.



How this seemingly impassable barrier of mountain was to be surmounted Van could not conceive, nor was Martin any wiser than himself. His own previous entry into Itambez had been under very different circumstances.

It will be remembered that Mr. Richard Briscoe and himself were the only survivors of the shipwreck on the coast of Peru. Making their way inland toward the nearest point of civilization, they had been taken prisoners by a wandering and bloodthirsty tribe of Indians, who, having destined them for slaves, carried them into the interior, beyond the Peruvian boundaries.

Fortunately, they were rescued by some friendly natives belonging within the province of Itambezi, and by them conducted through an apparently insurmountable mountain pass, among the southern ranges of the Cordilleras, to the city itself.

But on the northern boundary there was no sign of break or pass excepting the terrible canyon, through which the Canuma, dividing the city, made its exit, and thence flowed between the table lands to the Canuma lake. The canyon itself was, of course, impassable. How—

The silvery tinkle of a bell interrupted Van's conjectures on this particular point, as, on the morning of the third day after leaving the lake, Quipo, the runner, commanded a halt on a gentle slope leading upward to the base of the mighty range whose sides showed no sign of human presence.

Round a projecting spur came a train of small yellowish brown animals, suggestive of the western burro, or diminutive donkey, yet not in the least resembling them.



That they were Peruvian llamas, Van knew from the pictures he had seen of the gentle beasts. With soft, beseeching eyes and timid action, the drove—ten in number—followed their leader, who wore the bell, while a pretty, dark-skinned girl walked by its side.



## CHAPTER XII.

## OVER THE CORDILLERAS.

AT the sight of the three Europeans, with Quipo and the attendant Pescados, the girl waved her hand and uttered a low whistle. The well-trained animals came to a sudden stop.

"Everything has been looked out for, you see," remarked Martin quietly, as the remaining provisions were transferred to pack saddles worn by part of the llamas. Then the Pescados silently made their peculiar gesture of adieu, and filed away in the direction from which they had come.

A few words were exchanged between Quipo and the girl leader of the llamas, who signed to the strangers, whom she regarded with considerable curiosity, to mount the three largest of the docile animals. She herself walked on ahead, accompanied by Quipo and followed by the leader and the remaining llamas in single file.

It was all so strange and unreal that none of the trio seemed disposed for conversation. Martin was the most composed of the whole party—the negro Tom the most dazed and astounded.

Van did not suffer his own sensations of surprise and



bewilderment to come to the surface, and gradually the grandeur of the wonderful mountain scenery swallowed up all other emotions.

At first a mere footpath cut through the thick underbrush which covered the lower slopes, wound in a zigzag direction up the cliffs. As the sides grew steeper, the ascent became more and more difficult. Yet the llamas toiled patiently on—the peculiar construction of their clawlike hoof enabling them to keep a foothold where nothing else but a chamois or mountain goat could make progress.

As the sun disappeared behind the lofty range, sending an indescribable glory of gold and crimson flashing among the snowy peaks, the air grew visibly colder.

But this, too, had been provided for. From the back of one of the pack animals a heavy bundle was unstrapped and opened. Long warm cloaks woven from the soft wool of the vicuna, or Peruvian goat, were produced, and quickly donned by the entire party.

And so on and upward, when lo, a gap or rift in the mountain side revealed itself to the astonished eyes of the three newcomers, through which extended a military road that was a perfect marvel of engineering. Winding irregularly upward, it had been built across great ravines on solid bridges of stone masonry that had been standing for unnumbered centuries—were standing when Pizarro led his little handful of adventurers through the wonderful country he had discovered.

Here, an ascent had been cut through solid ledges. There, the road clung, so to speak, to the face of a precipice. And all the way it was constructed from



granite blocks and slabs held together by and covered with a sort of pitchy asphalt which had hardened into the consistency of the stone itself.

At intervals of ten and fifteen miles small houses of entertainment were placed, at one of which the party stopped for the night. There was nothing out of the ordinary in its surroundings, unless I except the natural boiling springs which had hollowed out for themselves circular chasms in the rocks behind the little inn. Over these a rude house had been built, and here the three adventurers enjoyed a much needed and refreshing bath.

At the respectful request of Quipo, their ragged, travel-stained clothing was left outside the bath house. And when it was time to dress, an agreeable surprise awaited them.

Their rags had disappeared, and in their place were suits of clean, cool linen. If not stylish in cut, the garments were eminently suited to the warmer temperature which they were told to expect on the morrow, as the road gradually sloped down to their final destination.

There was no particular mystery about the matter, but simply an illustration of Mr. Richard Briscoe's forethought. Both himself and Martin had been permitted to retain their European style of dress, which in effect did not differ so very much from that worn in Itambez. Similar clothing had been prepared for his nephew and the two others, each differing slightly in quality, that intended for Van being by far the finest, and forwarded to the mountain house by a runner from the city.

A small, silent man, who in dress and appearance resembled one of the better class Mexicans, officiated



as a barber. Though his "kit," carried in a leather bag attached to his sash, was of the most primitive kind, he made a very creditable job of it.

He never spoke throughout the entire procedure of hair cutting and shaving. This seemed quite remarkable, until Martin explained that by an edict of the province of Itambez only deaf mutes were allowed to practice the tonsorial art.

It was with a strange mixture of sensations that on the following morning Van again took up his journey.

Even the wonderful beauty of the sunrise, flooding the mountain peaks with intense colorings, failed to draw his attention excepting for the passing moment.

He was nearing a city the description of which read like a fairy tale. A city built more than a thousand years before by a people acquainted with many arts, and but little removed from a more advanced civilization, whose history was lost to their descendants.

A city where for successive ages powerful Incas had ruled and human sacrifices by thousands been offered in the temples. And so on, through successive generations of increasing knowledge, till the descendants of this mysterious race—if half what Martin told him was true—were a people who stood on a level with European civilization in many things, and far above it in some.

Martin himself betrayed a certain degree of excitement quite unlike his usual composure, though it was mixed with some very pronounced indications of joy at once more returning to the city of his choice. And the negro Tom, whose former familiarity toward his two white comrades had given place to a sort of respectful recognition of their superior claims, rode silently on—



ward by the side of Quipo the runner, in a state of amazed bewilderment at everything he saw.

Across a terrible chasm a thousand feet deep was a frail looking suspension bridge, whose swaying cables of twisted magwey fibers were made fast to immense stone buttresses on either side of the abyss.

Rails of the same material extended entirely across, while the flooring, if I may so term it, was of plank hewn by hand. Long guys were attached to either side, yet the structure swung and swayed as the cavalcade passed over it, and Van felt a decided sensation of relief when the llamas' feet struck the solid rock on the opposite side.

Then the way led through a vast tunnel cut through the granite side of the mountain, and lighted at intervals by apertures overhead.

And all at once, as the little party, half blinded by the sudden glare of sunlight, emerged again into the open day, Quipo and the girl guide, with a simultaneous gesture, commanded a pause.

Turning their faces toward the sun, they reverently bowed their heads, while from the lips of each escaped the single word "*Itambez!*"



## CHAPTER XIII.

## IN THE STREETS OF ITAMBEZ.

It is no matter of wonder that Van Briscoe sat speechless and motionless as his eyes rested upon the wonderful scene before them!

"There can be nothing else like it on the face of the globe," is written in his notebook, under the brief record of his first sensations on looking down upon Itambez. And from what he has told me with his own lips, I think the expression is not overdrawn.

I have said that the province of Itambezi is completely surrounded by a mighty ring of mountain ranges, among and above which towers the volcanic peak of Escomada.

At the base of the latter, Van saw far beneath, in the immense bowl-shaped valley clad in perpetual green, a mighty city, walled in like those of ancient days—a city whose roofs and towers glistened like burnished silver in the sun's rays.

Behind it the mountain sides rose in terraced slopes. The artificial garden enclosures thus formed mounted higher and higher, narrowing in proportion, almost to the line of separation between the last scanty growth of vegetation and the height of perpetual snow.



A thin, faintly wavering curl of pale blue smoke rose from the volcanic cone, half hidden in the drifting cloud vapors with which the smoke was blended.

As far as the eye could reach, the same wonderful panorama of terraced hill and mountain sides, transforming the bleak rocky slopes into fertile fields and gardens, met their gaze. A huge fortress commanded the entrance to the defile, and below them was the Canuma, flowing down from the southern hillsides through the city, and across the valley, till it disappeared in the canyon on the opposite side.

"Nebber see not'in' like *dat*—nebber!" emphatically exclaimed Tom, breaking the silence. With outstretched finger the negro pointed to the wonderful scene, and Martin assented with a short nod. Still Van had neither words or signs by which to express his own enthusiasm.

But Quipo was growing impatient, and again the little cavalcade was set in motion. The road now wound directly downward toward the city, through the humbler dwellings and farms of the suburban residents.

Martin, who had laid aside his usual taciturnity, pointed out the various objects of interest as they passed along. He showed Van how in the wide and extensive terrace farms nearer the base of the mountains were cultivated only the crops which flourish best in a tropical temperature. Higher up were the cereals and hardier fruits or flowers; thus ascending in narrowing grades to the colder heights, where only the very hardiest could grow.

He called Van's attention to the vast stone granaries



and warehouses containing the manufactured products of the country; the great mint, filled to overflowing with gold bricks and blocks from the mines within a pistol shot of the city; and he explained that silver itself was not regarded as a circulating medium, but was used chiefly as are the baser metals with us.

And so the travelers passed, with a successive continuation of novel sights and sounds, along through the outlying suburbs—the cynosure of curious eyes—till the city gates were reached.

Dismounting in obedience to a sign from Quipo, the girl, with a graceful obeisance, turned away. She was followed by the docile beasts of burden, while Van, instructed by Quipo, Martin acting as interpreter, presented the letter which served as a passport to one of the half-dozen tall, soldierly-looking guards who stood before the great archway. Above the gate the royal insignia were deeply cut in the keystone.

Recognizing the imprint of the seal, the soldier, who was dressed in a sleeveless tunic of quilted cotton, and armed with a long copper-tipped lance, pressed the letter to his forehead. Then he returned it to Van with every visible mark of respect, and the guards were motioned back.

In a maze of bewildered astonishment and excitement, Van passed through the great stone arch, followed by his two companions, and in another moment the three were standing in the well paved street of one of the oldest cities in the world!

Yet after all there was little of the marvelous about it. A sluggish tide of humanity in its various phases ebbed through the by no means crowded thoroughfares,



not differing particularly as to types from those one might meet in some old Spanish city.

The dress and language were different from those met with by the traveler in foreign countries. Yet the former seemed peculiarly adapted to the tropical but not overpowering heat, while in the latter Van's ear detected very many Spanish sounding words, which he easily interpreted, having taken up Spanish in his schoolship studies.

The people as a whole showed a marked resemblance in many respects of form and feature to the highest type of the French or Spanish creole, as met at the present day in parts of Louisiana.

If Van had cherished any vague expectations that the appearance of the travelers might create anything like a sensation, he was doomed to disappointment. Curious glances were of course cast in their direction, as, guided by Martin, the trio slowly made their way toward the great central square of the city. Tom's black face and huge form seemed to attract the principal share of notice. But, as Van soon discovered, the people of Itambez seem almost entirely devoid of curiosity or inquisitiveness.

From time to time Martin exchanged quiet greetings with one and another, yet as far as any show of effusiveness was concerned, he might have been absent from Itambez for a day instead of years.

The dress of all classes, so far as Van could see, was a sort of semi-European garb, only differing in quality.

Shirts and trousers, with a sort of tunic or blouse of white or cream colored linen, or a thin perfectly water-



proof cloth, woven from goats' hair, was the prevailing attire. A hat, woven from some peculiar species of rushes, and sandals, or a sort of low shoe, made of soft dressed leather, completed the easy and graceful costume.

But it must be remembered that the province of Itambezi is between the fifth and sixth parallels of southern latitude. The temperature of the city proper seldom rose above  $90^{\circ}$  or fell below  $80^{\circ}$  the year round. Yet there was enough humidity in the air to produce warm drenching dews at night, rendering unnecessary the prolonged rainy season met in the regions upon the equator. Occasional brief showers swept down from the mountains during three months of the year, but for the rest it might be said that it was a country bathed in perpetual sunshine.

The women, both young and middle-aged, (for Van saw no persons of either sex who might be called old,) were without exception strikingly beautiful. A white waist and rather short skirt of the same material, with a shoe of soft, untanned leather, was the quite universal garb. The head was uncovered, save for its glossy coils of abundant hair, while a few wore a sort of scarf of crimson silk thrown lightly over their shapely shoulders.

But there was no chance for further observation of the manners and customs of this interesting people. The travelers had reached the great square, bordered on its four sides by massive stone buildings two and three stories high, which, as Martin explained, were set apart for the use of the city. There was a council chamber, another corresponding in certain respects to



a house of parliament, another for astrological pursuits, and still another known as the Temple.

"And now, Mr. Briscoe," said Martin, suddenly, "pull yourself together—for if my eyes don't deceive me, Mr. Richard Briscoe himself is coming to meet you."



## CHAPTER XIV.

## A DAUGHTER OF ITAMBEZ.

VAN BRISCOE'S heart beat tumultuously. Following the direction of Martin's gaze, he saw approaching them from one of the city buildings a tall, well built man, with a heavy flowing beard and hair as dark as Van's own, neither showing a thread of gray.

His own father Van could but indistinctly recall, yet Captain Peterson had more than once spoken of the wonderful resemblance between the twin brothers, James and Richard, in their younger days. So it was that in the features of his uncle he felt that he saw the reflected likeness of the father who had died when he was a mere boy.

It was plainly evident that Richard Briscoe, despite his identification with a people among whom strong emotions would seem to be unknown, had not lost the power of being moved.

Something very much like moisture was in his dark eyes as he walked directly toward Van, who stepped forward to meet him. He grasped both of the boy's hands in his own, while Martin and the negro dropped respectfully to the rear.

"My brother, then, is"—here he hesitated, but added "dead" in a lower tone. "And you, whom I should



have known to be his son even had your coming not been foreseen," he went on, "you are——"

"Vance Briscoe, Uncle Richard," was the reply, in a voice which trembled never so slightly as he intently returned the cordial hand clasp given him by Mr. Briscoe, who then quickly addressed himself to the sailor.

"Martin, I'm glad, though not surprised, to see you back," he said, quietly. "I fancy," he added, with a keen glance at the sailor's slightly embarrassed face, "that you didn't find much pleasure, or profit, either, in going back into the world."

"We won't speak of that, Mr. Briscoe," hurriedly returned Martin, over whose bronzed face a flush of shame had passed; "it is enough that I *am* back, and never want to go outside the city walls till I'm carried out, toes first, to the burial cave."

Mr. Briscoe smiled, and shrugged his shoulders, without replying directly.

"Well, Martin," he said, "you'd better take your companion to the house with you, and to-morrow I'll hear your story—or so much of it as you wish to tell—*adios*."

Thus saying, Mr. Briscoe with rather scant ceremony turned away. Leaving the two men to follow at their leisure, he took Van gently by the arm, and walked away precisely as he would if he had met him in any of our great cities.

"There are a thousand questions to ask and answer, my dear boy," he said, gravely returning the respectful salutations of one after another of those who were passing and repassing; "but there is abundant time for it







here give, Mr. Briscoe, whose dress was very much like that affected by a well-to-do Calcutta merchant, explained as they walked along.

The wealthiest part of the city was built on gently ascending slopes, against the side of Escomada. Here, situated in a perfect wilderness of the most luxuriant growth of tropic vegetation that ever gladdened the heart and eyes of a lover of the beautiful, was Mr. Briscoe's home.

Like many of those in South America, the flat-roofed structure was built around a square courtyard, entered by arches beneath the upper rooms. Every chamber opened upon a balcony looking down into the yard, where a fountain perpetually sent up its silvery jets among great aloes and tree ferns in stone vases almost as old as the pyramids of Egypt.

The wide veranda, commanding a view of the city and fertile valley, was a mass of odorous blossoming foliage, such as no other clime could produce.

Van's heart was beating considerably faster than usual. And as he followed Mr. Briscoe in silence up a flight of stone steps, worn in little hollows by the feet of successive generations, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels, he stopped with a little exclamation.

Now just here I have to hesitate for a moment. For when Van's notebook speaks of suddenly coming upon the most beautiful young girl he had ever dreamed of seeing, I have to pause. But I have seen Ninada herself, after all. And perhaps I can imagine how she appeared to Van's delighted and astonished gaze as she stepped forward, without the slightest seeming embar-



rassment, and placed two slender white hands in Van's brown palm, at a signal from her father.

Ninada was then only fifteen, but in face and form she seemed at least two years older. Her features were exquisite, her complexion that of the clearest brunette, with the unfathomable dusky eyes of a Spanish senorita.

Her wonderful wealth of silky black hair, shot through with a natural ripple, was coiled deftly about her small head, and there confined by a golden arrow incrustated with diamonds.

A simple flowing robe of some creamy white fabric, encircled at the slender waist by a crimson sash of quaint workmanship, fell in unconfined folds to her small feet.

"This is your Cousin Van, Ninada," said her father. Van, coloring through his sunburned skin, murmured something unintelligible, and unconsciously gave a slight pressure to the girl's slim white hands before relinquishing them.

"As the wise men said, my brother James is no longer living," continued Mr. Briscoe, with a sigh; "and it is his son who has come these thousands of miles to claim what I have set apart for my kith and kin."

"How brave you must be, my cousin," said the young girl, in clear musical tones.

There was much to be said and told on both sides, but only the briefest explanations were then entered upon. Mr. Briscoe was soon called away. Then, sitting on a broad stone bench under the cooling shade, Van listened with eager interest while Ninada, with charming frankness, took her new found friend at once into her confidence,



With her soft dark eyes shining through tear drops, she spoke of the mother she had lost in helpless infancy. She told of the loving care of her father, who from the first had shown a desire that his Ninada should learn and know of European manners and customs so far as they did not conflict with those peculiar to the province of Itambez.

So it was that she not only spoke his own language as readily as that of her country, but she was by no means ignorant of the social laws and requirements of ordinary civilization, as well as of a great many other matters pertaining to the world without, all of which had been told and taught her by her father.



## CHAPTER XV.

## IN A GOLDEN CITY.

MR. BRISCOE'S household, as Van learned, consisted of himself, Ninada, and a young fellow named Flores, to whom Mr. Briscoe had acted as guardian since the death of his parents—Flores's father having been chief magistrate before Van's uncle.

"Flores is very nice-looking, and speaks your language even better than I do," said Ninada, slowly. "Father has taken great pains to teach and tell him about your country, and he is very intelligent and interesting; but——"

And here she stopped, with her slim finger just touching her lips, as a slenderly built young fellow, dressed very much after the manner of his guardian, glided suddenly from the arching doorway and confronted the two.

"Flores," said Ninada—and Van fancied that he detected the least shade of pride in her tone and manner—"this is my Cousin Vance from the far-away country father has told about. His father is no longer living, so he has himself come in answer to my father's letter."

"So I see," was the cool and easy reply. But he smiled as he spoke, and extended his hand in true European style. Yet as Van took it he had an intuitive feel-



ing that under this seeming show of courtesy was an indefinable something suggestive of a subtle enmity.

And on his own part Van was conscious of a sudden feeling of dislike for this young fellow, with the form of a youthful Apollo, and his dark, finely cut features. But this perhaps arose from a spice of jealousy.

Like Ninada herself, Flores in speech and manner showed every outward mark of refinement and good breeding. Neither of them appeared like young people who had been isolated from the world. Ninada pronounced her words with a slight trace of the Spanish accent peculiar to her own language, which itself added a grace to her conversation.

Flores would have passed for a well educated young Spaniard or Brazilian in almost any society. And this was due in part to the natural aptitude as well as the real intellect of the race from which they had descended, and partly to the careful and thorough teaching of Mr. Briscoe himself.

When Van's uncle returned a little later, Van very modestly was telling of all that had befallen him since sailing in the schooner Rattler. Ninada, to whom the narrative was a new revelation, sat half reclining in a silk hammock, drinking in every word with rapt attention. Flores, with folded arms, stood leaning against one of the vine-entwined stone pilasters, trying with but indifferent success to conceal his own evident interest in Van's story.

Then Mr. Briscoe himself began questioning Van concerning the death of his twin brother, Van's father. The latter could only tell the little he had learned from Captain Peterson. Captain James Briscoe had died of coast



fever on the return passage from the south coast of Africa, and been buried at sea, Van himself being not quite three years old at the time. There was a small sum of money left for the support of the orphaned child, whom Captain Peterson had informally adopted as soon as he knew of Captain Briscoe's death. And the good captain had been a true father to his adopted son.

Then followed the story of Martin's appearance in America with Richard Briscoe's letter, and the results with which the reader is acquainted. After this Van described his unexpected meeting with Martin in Para, which none of his hearers thought in the least strange.

"You will see and hear far stranger things before you leave Itambez," said Mr. Briscoe with a smile; after which a grave looking servant with distinctively Indian features gave the summons to dinner.

Mr. Briscoe had tried to introduce European fashions and habits into his own household as far as possible. And as Van learned later, many of the inhabitants of Itambez—particularly the higher orders of society—had copied them to a greater or less extent.

And so in a large cool apartment, whose stone walls were fantastically frescoed in quaint patterns and colors, a table was spread, and around it were cushioned seats of mahogany, inlaid with mother of pearl.

The meal itself was of the most appetizing order, though prepared in a manner not unlike that employed in Mexican or Spanish cookery. There were fish from the river, ortolans from the valley, and mutton from the mountain uplands. There was sherbet cooled with snow from the Cordilleran peaks, and fragrant coffee grown within a pistol shot of the estate, with such a profusion



of fruits as no description of mine can do justice to.

But it was not so much the richness and variety of the repast which excited Van's secret wonder and admiration, as the service itself.

Now I am perfectly aware that I must speak guardedly respecting certain features of Itambez, lest this story of Van Briscoe's be regarded as a fanciful record of impossible fiction.

Yet I am forced to mention the display of dishes and plate which graced the table. There were solid silver and solid gold bowls and vases, some of them bearing marks of great antiquity. Cups and plates of the same precious metals, hammered and worked into the quaintest and strangest of devices, were placed before every guest. There was no glassware, but in its place most beautiful glazed pottery, some as fragile and delicate as the rarest porcelain, others wrought into wonderfully artistic designs.

Silent servants in half European garb glided softly to and from the room, the atmosphere of which was cooled by an ever moving *punkah* suspended above the table, precisely as in an East Indian bungalow.

The long, narrow apertures in the stone sides of the room, which served as windows, were curtained on the outside with flowering foliage, from which came strange spicy odors not unlike those of the tube-rose. In fact, the entire surroundings and scene were suggestive of an Arabian Nights' entertainment.

From the conversation carried on during the meal, Van learned quite a good deal regarding the government of the city and province. The chief executive was *Xalaqua* the governor. His power was limited by a



council of ten of the wisest and best among the citizens. The chief magistrate was also his adviser, while under the latter were subordinate officers of lesser grade and rank.

Crime was of rare occurrence, and punished with instant death by beheading. Lesser offenses, such as stealing, assaults, and the hundred other petty criminalities peculiar to cities throughout the world, were themselves by no means common.

This is not strange, for two very especial reasons. In the first place, the vast mineral and agricultural wealth of the province gave every man more than abundance—all he had to do was to seek it. Poverty was unknown, hence no man coveted his neighbor's wealth.

And in the second place, intoxicants were banished from city and province alike, by the sternest of prohibitory edicts. Even the lighter wines, such as are manufactured from native grapes the world over, were wanting in Itambez. Their use in sickness was not needed, for the reason that sickness itself was rare in that equable temperature and health-giving air. And where intoxicants are not found in any form, there you will notice a corresponding absence of crime in its various phases.

That Van should at once begin to learn the easy language was his uncle's first definite proposition. And that Ninada herself should be his teacher, afforded as much secret delight to Van as ill-concealed vexation to Flores. But Mr. Briscoe had his reasons for thus doing, so the matter was settled then and there.

One day in Itambez was the delightful counterpart of that preceding it, and ~~the~~ **the one following.**



Van generally rose before the sun had shown his ruddy face behind the eastern crest of the mountain ranges. And when he went out into the open courtyard or upon the veranda, ten to one Ninada was there. Sometimes with great masses of rare blossoms in her white arms, for the decoration of the quaint interior. At other times feeding some one of the numerous pets of which almost every family in Itambez kept one or more.

There was a tiny spider monkey, a pair of tame toucans, and at least half a dozen parrots and parakeets, that were suffered to fly at will about the courtyard. A long legged white ibis was generally seen gravely stalking—storking, Van said—behind his beautiful young mistress, as she roamed through the wonderful terraced garden, which itself was like a glance into fairyland. Pet squirrels ate from her hand, a chameleon perched contentedly, if changefully, on her shoulder, and even Pedro, the armadillo, would thrust his head from its shell at her call.

Flores, whose room adjoined Van's was indolent, and seldom left his hammock till long after the others, so that Van and Ninada were left much to their own devices in the morning hour.

And it was wonderful how fast Van Briscoe acquired the musical language spoken in Itambez.

Blessed with magnificent health, the young girl was indefatigable in showing her cousin the "sights" of the city.

True, there were no theaters or concerts, ball rooms or picture galleries. But there were temples with pictured walls, and hieroglyphics in indelible colors,



recording the deeds of other dynasties ; where grave looking robed priests officiated in rites that had descended down through generations.

There were the halls and council chambers, where stood full length statues of famous warriors or statesmen of their own race, skillfully wrought in solid silver.

There were the open workshops of the various artisans along the business street, where gold and silver were wrought into beautiful and curious designs. There were the lapidaries' shops where piles of uncut gems from the mines and river beds of the province lay heaped up on the benches within reach of the passers by ; armorers, who by a secret process gave the hammered copper the temper of Damascus steel, and venders of rare stuffs, rivaling those of the foreign bazaars, woven in rude looms set up and worked before the eyes of the purchaser.



## CHAPTER XVI.

## VAN MAKES AN ENEMY.

BUT the most impressive and wonderful of all the sights of Itambez, according to Van's account, was what he saw in the great burial cave beyond the city walls, whither he was accompanied by Ninada and Flores—the latter having taken it into his handsome head to accompany the cousins whenever it was possible—not always to the satisfaction of the young girl or her escort.

“I used to think much of Flores when we were both younger; he almost seemed like a brother to me then,” Ninada confided to Van one day, “but for the past year he is—somehow different.” And Van wondered whether it was the little flush which crossed the girl's fair cheek as she spoke, that suddenly suggested to his own mind what the difference might consist in.

The burial cave was itself a vast cavern of almost infinite extent, running far back into the bowels of one of the mountains adjoining Escomada.

Massive sculptured pillars engraved with strange characters stood on either side of the lofty entrance. Just inside was the temple, where the last burial rights were performed.



Preceded by guides with torches, the three walked slowly through immense arches and galleries of the dead. Laid on shelves of stone, or in separate niches, were the bodies of young and old. So wonderful is the process of embalming perfected in Itambezi, that, in connection with the preservative power of the cave atmosphere, it made it almost impossible for the stranger to discriminate between those who had lain there in their last sleep for a century and those borne to their silent resting-place but a few days before.

In a separate part of the cavern was the resting-place of the Incas. Here with bowed heads and crossed hands, sitting upon golden chairs, as in life, were the embalmed bodies of successive generations of rulers, attired in their kingly robes.

As Van has since said, there was nothing repulsive or even ghastly in these strange forms of death, upon which time had been unable to leave his trace for centuries.

It was rather awe-inspiring, and then, too, no one in Itambez seemed to look upon death with anything approaching fear.

Reverently and with uncovered head, Van stood with Ninada by the side of her beautiful mother, as beautiful in death as in life; and very tenderly the young girl touched her lips, first to the broad white forehead, then to the folded waxen hands.

"Why should I weep?" she said, quietly, in answer to some whispered remark from Flores. "My mother is only sleeping." For as Van afterward knew, the people of Itambez have a full faith in a future life, where the good are happy and the wicked punished.



Then there were excursions into the beautiful surrounding country and up the mountain sides, on the sure footed llamas. And all the while Van was becoming more and more closely bound, not only to Itambe, but to Ninada.

Thus far, neither Mr. Briscoe, nor his daughter, nor Martin, who acted as a sort of confidential steward for Van's uncle, had made the slightest direct allusion to the one main object of Van's visit to Itambe.

It is needless to say that Van himself made none. Indeed, so wrapped up was he in his present surroundings, that past and future alike seemed to have slipped away from him, and he was content to dream and drift.

Tom, the negro, seemed to share a similar state of feeling. He was employed by Mr. Briscoe as a head gardener, with a dozen or more subordinates under him, so that Van occasionally met him.

"Tell you what, Mist' Briscoe," he would sometimes say, with the broadest kind of smile, "any one dat would leave dis here Paradise without he was druv out by the angel wid a flamin' sword, mus' be de bigges' kind ob fool;" and Van mentally agreed with him.

Now, whether Flores had ever been told concerning the inheritance Van had come to take away from Itambe, the latter could not tell. His manner toward Van was outwardly courteous, but he seldom made much conversation with him, excepting when making inquiries as to matters connected with the outer world, in which he seemed far more interested than in his own surroundings. Yet Van was conscious of being continually watched by a pair of glittering eyes, whose owner bore him anything but good will. And he could assign



but one cause for the other's unfriendly attitude—namely, jealousy.

For that Flores had something more than a friendly regard for his guardian's daughter was very plain. In our own more temperate climates this would have seemed merely a youthful folly to be quickly outgrown. But among races who dwell in the tropics there is a different order of things.

The clear moonlight was flooding the city with an almost noonday radiance. A wonderful stillness reigned in every locality. There were none of the sounds of tramping feet and rumbling wheels—of loud voices or of clanging church bells, as in our own great marts of busy trade.

Van had been enjoying a stroll by himself in the public square, where in the cool of the evening and beauty of the moon rays, many of the younger people of Itambez were lingering.

Many bright eyes were turned approvingly upon the manly form and regular features of the young stranger from another land, whose presence had now become familiar to many in the city.

But it occurred to Van, as he turned away from the wonderfully beautiful scene, and made his way through the quiet streets, that among all the fair faces he had seen that evening there were none so lovely as that of his cousin Ninada.

Now, this is no love story, please understand. Yet the threads of these two young lives were so curiously woven—by fate or by Providence as you may choose to think—that this natural element has to have its place. And surely there is nothing more beautiful than a pure



affection between two of the opposite sex, in early life.

Occasionally Van encountered a drowsy night watchman in his quilted tunic, and with his helmet shaped cap overlaid with plates of silver. Carrying a sort of halberd as the mark of his calling, he patrolled his precinct in a prefunctory sort of way, yet in this happy city his office was the merest sinecure.

Thinking what a strange contrast it all was to the sights and sounds to which he had been accustomed, Van walked slowly up the gentle grassy slope leading to Ninada's home, half hoping he might find the young girl alone on the stone veranda.

Ninada was there, but not alone. As Van was about ascending the steps he heard the voice of Flores, speaking in a decidedly melodramatic manner, on the other side of the leafy curtain which extended from one stone pilaster to another.

"I tell you, Ninada, I *hate* him!"

Intuition told Van that he himself was the subject of this little ebullition of feeling, and, though it was not the perfectly correct thing to do, he stood a moment to hear Ninada's reply.

"But why?" she said, calmly. "Van has never harmed you."

"He *has*; and no one knows better than you how!" was the reply, in a voice of repressed passion. "Before he came," Flores went on impetuously, as the rustle of the young girl's dress showed that she had risen to her feet, "you were very different toward me, you——"

"Flores, I will not stop to hear you speak in such a way," quickly interrupted the young girl.



As she thus said, Ninada turned and walked rapidly toward the top of the steps, midway of which Van was standing.

Flores, whose ungoverned temper had never known the slightest restraint, sprang after her, and seized her slender wrist in his grasp.

“You *shall* stop !” he fiercely exclaimed.

As Ninada, with a slight cry, tried to release herself, Van, feeling his blood tingling to his finger tips, stood before him.

“You will let go Ninada’s wrist,” he said, as calmly as he could ; yet there was a suggestion of menace in his voice.

“Not at *your* bidding !” scornfully replied the now infuriated young man.

In another moment Flores’s wrists were pinioned in a grip to which Van’s anger gave additional strength, and as the former involuntarily relaxed his hold, Ninada sprang away from him.



## CHAPTER XVII.

## A REVELATION.

THE two young men stood for a moment facing each other, Van's calm though determined face being in marked contrast to the anger distorted features of his antagonist. Then, with a fierce wrench, Flores released himself, and as he did so thrust his hand quickly inside the folds of his loose shirt with a suggestive motion.

But as Van instinctively stepped backward a strange thing occurred.

Can you imagine a passing zephyr taking shape for a brief second? Van tells me he has no other way of expressing himself concerning it. Between himself and Flores drifted a half seen shadowy mist, having neither shape nor substance. Van felt a slight breath across his hot cheek—and it was gone!

Possibly it was a tiny cloud of night vapor wafted down from the mountain side, but however that may be, Flores grew deathly pale, and, uttering a low ejaculation, withdrew his hand from its hiding-place—empty. Then, without speaking a word, he turned, and hurrying down the steps, disappeared in the shadows.

Rather perplexed, yet unconscious of any reason for particular wonderment, Van looked inquiringly at



Ninada, who betrayed no sign of emotion further than a quickened movement of breathing, as she stood with slightly parted lips looking in the direction Flores had taken.

"Did he hurt your wrist, Ninada?" gently asked Van, breaking the momentary silence.

"Oh, no," she said quietly, as she suffered Van to lead her to the stone seat where the two sat in silence.

Ninada seemed to be hesitating as though she had something very particular to say, and yet had not formulated her words as she wished. And having seen for himself that the young girl's wrist was uninjured, Van was taking advantage of her preoccupation by retaining her hand, under pretence of examining a very remarkable ring on one of her fingers.

"Cousin Van," finally said Ninada in a voice that was slightly tremulous, "my father and I have had a long and important conversation to-day—and—I want to tell you regarding it."

"I am listening," was the quiet reply.

"My mother," Ninada went on slowly, "was the daughter of one of the wisest men in the city. Of course it sounds incredible and perhaps foolish to you," she continued with a wistful smile, "but our wise men do and understand some very strange things that perhaps you would hardly believe if I told you."

At one time Van's matter of fact nature would have secretly scoffed at such an assertion.

But since his stay in Itambez, he himself had seen and heard a number of curious illustrations of optical delusions that rather went beyond anything he had known before.



For example. A person corresponding to an East Indian *fakir* had taken his place on the smooth-shaven lawn—his few requirements being carried in an embroidered pouch at his sash.

The inexplicable feat of the seed growing, familiar to most East Indian travelers, had been performed. The pomegranate stone placed in the earth and covered with transparent gauze had grown to a height of ten inches, and shot out little branches, before Van's astonished eyes. A twig plucked from a flowering shrub, and stripped downward between the fingers, had thrown off a score of tiny shining lizards, which went scampering off through the grass.

Three translucent globes of some waxy substance, tossed one by one into the air, had there remained moving slowly about each other, only to return at the fakir's command. And so on.

Then, too, he had seen a tiny bit of paper flutter down from somewhere overhead and fall at Mr. Briscoe's elbow, which being opened was found to be a message from some of the wise men.

And so while Van had seen nothing that came strictly under the head of the supernatural, he had been greatly puzzled at certain phenomena, of which I have just given illustrations.

"The—whatever it was which passed between Flores and myself seemed strange to *me*," finally returned Van.

Ninada smiled, but offered no explanation.

"I hardly know how to go on," she slowly continued, "because those of your own race believe so differently; yet——"

"But you are partly one of my own race," eagerly



interrupted Van—and probably it was this reflection which made him draw a little nearer his fair relative, who did not seem in the least offended.

“Yes,” Ninada answered slowly; “but then, excepting from my father himself, I have only heard the teachings of my mother’s people. But I will tell you frankly, as my father told me to do,” she said, suddenly, “and I know you will neither laugh at nor ridicule me.”

“Never,” returned Van, with more emphasis than the occasion would seem to call for; and Ninada, lowering her voice involuntarily, went on;

“From something told her by my grandfather,” she half whispered, “my mother believed that it would be unsafe for me to remain in Itambez from my sixteenth to my seventeenth year; so she made father promise just before she died that I should leave the country. That is what he had to tell me—with other things—to-day.”

“To leave Itambezi!” responded Van, in tones of strong amazement. “But where would you go, Ninada?”

“*To your own land—when you are ready to go back,*” was the reply, and I do not wonder that as he heard it, Van gave a great start of astonishment.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE SMOKING VOLCANO.

WITHOUT doubt, it was the prospect of an approaching separation which made Mr. Richard Briscoe so downcast when he and Van met on the morning after Ninada's disclosure of her father's purpose for herself.

Yet underlying it all was—so it seemed to Van—a deeper feeling of uneasiness, and even a sort of nervous dread, for which the latter could not account.

“Setting aside the peculiar views of Ninada's grandfather, who firmly believed as many people do the world over, that the destiny of every life is controlled by the stars,” he said, “I want her for two or three years at least, to have the advantages of an American education and American society——”

“But, Uncle Richard,” eagerly interrupted Van, “why do *you* not go with Ninada? Surely you could leave Itambez for a time and return to it as Martin did.”

Mr. Brisco shook his head.

“It is impossible,” he said, firmly. “Ninada herself knows why, and—and is reconciled to it.”

Van wanted very much to ask what good the social and educational advantages purposed for his cousin would do her if her remaining life was to be spent outside the pale of the world where those things were to be gained.



But he did not wish to appear inquisitive, and further than this, he felt there was something which Mr. Briscoe was holding back. Whether he should discover what it was, remained to be seen.

Rather to the relief of Van, Flores showed no signs of resentment when they again met. He was smooth and cool and courteous ; he addressed Ninada with his usual easy self-possession, and there was nothing in his manner to suggest the conflict of passion going on within.

Only once did a sign of the cloven foot show itself.

Mr. Briscoe, with Ninada by his side, was standing on the balcony overlooking the courtyard, gazing upward toward the far away summit of Escomada, while a short distance away were Van and Flores.

Now ever since Van's arrival in Itambeze he had grown accustomed to an occasional sound of a deep internal rumbling, which arose seemingly from the very bowels of the volcano. For more than a year—so they told him—this phenomenon, which is by no means uncommon in volcanic regions, had been noticeable.

But on the previous night, the rumbling had sounded deeper and more prolonged. Through the darkness they had seen the clouds about the cone shaped peak tinged with a wonderfully awe-inspiring lurid glow.

And at the time of which I speak, a thick, sooty smoke, unlike the thin spiral usually seen, was rising and flattening itself out—if I may thus express it—against the masses of clouds just above the crater.

“Escomada looks quite threatening, father,” said Ninada, in very much the same tone she would have used in speaking of an approaching shower.

“The saying of the wise men is coming true,” quietly



observed Flores, but as both Van and Ninada regarded him inquiringly, Mr. Briscoe, with a show of irritation very unlike his usual even, dispassionate manner, turned upon his ward.

“Don’t talk nonsense, Flores,” he exclaimed, sharply. “You know very well that their saying referred to the slight and perfectly harmless eruption whose effects Van noticed and spoke of having felt a little before he came to us.”

Flores shrugged his shoulders.

“The small reservoir among the lower hills has gone dry,” he said, with a meaning in his tone which perhaps Mr. Briscoe alone comprehended.

It was at the same moment that Van suddenly pointed upward with his hand.

“Look,” he said, in a low tone.

From the distant crater rose a livid column of mingled fire and smoke, like a gigantic blazing tree trunk with wide spreading branches. It quivered in the smoky atmosphere for a moment—as wondrous a sight as the fiery cross which Constantine saw in the heavens—and then sank down into the density from which it had risen!

A slight exclamation escaped Ninada’s lips, but glancing at her father she was quickly reassured by the calm immobility of his features. So, to a certain extent, was Van himself.

But the strange phenomenon had only for a second attracted Flores’s attention. His piercing eyes, following the direction of Van’s extended hand, had seen something of far greater importance to himself.

Grasping Van’s wrist with a quick movement, he drew the young fellow’s hand toward him.



“ You have given him *the ring*, Ninada ! ” said Flores, in a curiously repressed voice, which, with the act itself, at once attracted the notice of her father, who looked keenly from one to the other of the three, without speaking.

“ Why should I not do as I wish with my own ! ” proudly answered the beautiful girl, drawing herself up to her full stature. Apparently finding the question difficult to answer, Flores, with a fierce exclamation which I fear was an oath in choice Itambezi, flung Van’s hand rudely from him, and, without replying, entered the house.

Now the ring referred to was one which I casually mentioned as having ornamented Ninada’s slim finger the evening before. It was a large oval gem resembling the moonstone of Ceylon. Glowing up through the milky whiteness was the wonderful iridescent sheen of the fine opal, changing in every light. The beautiful stone was set in a band of dull gold, inside of which were engraved the insignia of Itambez.

“ Last night, father,” said Ninada, upon whose clear cheek the faintest touch of color had come and gone like the dusky spark in the gem itself, “ I gave the ring to my cousin, as a seal of our friendship. Was it well ? ”

“ It *was* well, Ninada,” gravely answered her father, with a curious look into Van’s manly, earnest face.

“ And Van,” he said, as though satisfied with what he saw in the young man’s features, “ let me say this. In Itambez the giving of a ring containing the *bezel* stone implies the strongest friendship known. By your acceptance of it, I shall look to you to be my daughter’s protector and guardian when I shall have given her into



your charge as her escort to the world she has never seen. In a sense, you will stand in my own place. Do you accept the charge?"

"I do," said Van, solemnly, as, taking the young girl's hand, he raised it to his lips. "And may God do by me as I by Ninada."

This may sound a little high flown to the average reader, yet somehow even to Van's matter of fact nature it did not so occur. The circumstances that had called it forth were the most impressive his life had ever known, and Van Briscoe felt every word that he said. And he meant it, too.

Mr. Briscoe drew a long breath, as though part of a great burden had been lifted from his mind, while Ninada's beautiful eyes filled with tears.

"But why should Flores show so much resentment?" rather impulsively asked Van.

He repented the question as quickly as he had asked it.

Partly because the reason itself occurred to him in the rich crimson that suddenly mantled in Ninada's cheeks, and partly at the frown which appeared on her father's face.

"He is an undisciplined, evil passioned young fellow?" sharply returned Mr. Briscoe. "But I am glad he has taken himself out of the way," he went on, his face clearing as he spoke; "for there is something to be done in which he has no part."

It was on the tip of Van's tongue to ask how much Flores knew of his guardian's intentions regarding Ninada, but there was no chance just then.

A flight of stone steps led from the balcony down into



the courtyard, and in obedience to a mute gesture from Mr. Briscoe, the two followed him thither. He passed through an arched doorway on the opposite side of the courtyard from the living apartments, leading into a part of the house Van had not before visited.

Guiding them through a connecting suite of small rooms with low stone ceilings curiously ornamented in arabesque, Mr. Briscoe paused before the southern wall of the final chamber.

The room was bare of all attempt at furnishing, except for its hangings of leather stamped in curious designs, representing birds, beasts and flowers with a considerable degree of skill. All these were in excellent preservation, considering the unknown centuries through which they had thus remained.

Mr. Briscoe raised a fold of the hangings on the eastern wall, displaying the admirable masonry of the ancients, fitting so cleverly as to need no confining cement.

The solid slabs of stone, about four feet in width, reaching from the ceiling to the floor, were jointed so neatly together that a knife-blade could not be inserted between them. They were placed horizontally side by side, instead of being laid transversely.



## CHAPTER XIX.

## THE TREASURE CHAMBER.

COUNTING from the right-hand corner, Mr. Briscoe pushed gently on the side of the seventh slab. Greatly to Van's surprise it swung noiselessly as on a pivot at the top and bottom, leaving an aperture some two feet in width on either side.

"Nearly all the original dwellings in the city have something like this—probably intended, by the founders of Itambez, as hiding-places, in case of an enemy's incursion," explained Van's uncle. Then, holding the uplifted fold of the hangings, he motioned Van and Ninada to enter.

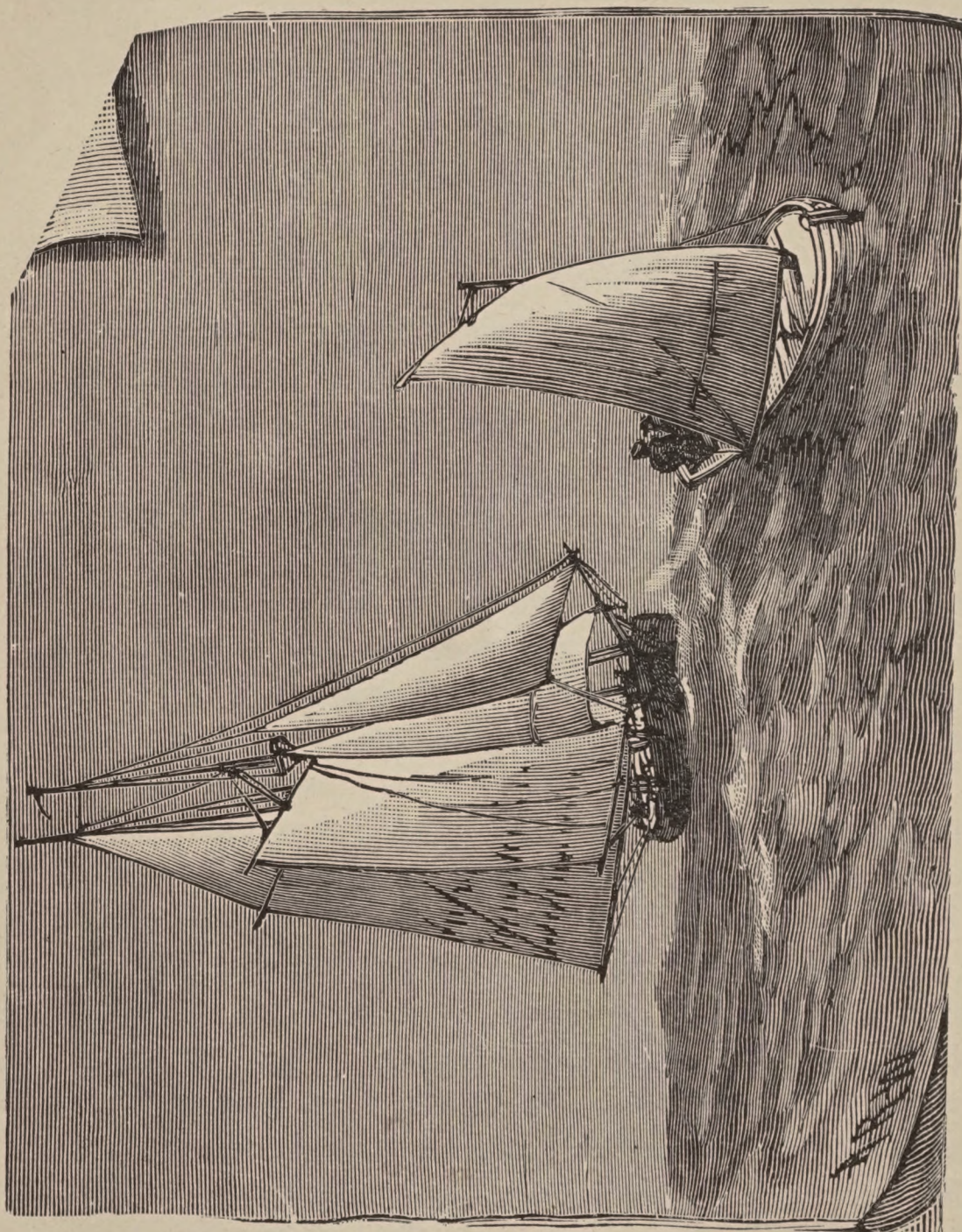
"Father, myself, and Flores—with you now, Cousin Van—are the only ones who know of this," half whispered Ninada.

Swinging the slab back to place, Mr. Briscoe led the way through a narrow winding gallery, from which other passages branched off on the right and left. Though not an aperture for ventilation or light was visible, the air was pure and sweet, while by means of some phosphoric substance, mixed with the white pigment which covered the walls, there was no difficulty in following the passage. It ended abruptly in a flight of stone steps.









UNDER FULL SAIL.



Descending these, the trio found themselves in a perfectly circular room, perhaps twenty feet in diameter, with a dome-like ceiling. From the middle of it depended a sort of antique lamp, which sent out a curious perfume as it burned with a steady, unwavering flame.

"Ah, you have been down here to-day, father," said Ninada, looking curiously about her.

"I was here nearly all night, daughter," was the grave reply. And then, seating himself on a quaintly-wrought and embossed coffer of copper, Mr. Briscoe motioned the two to seats on a couple of others. Several such coffers were ranged about the circular apartment.

"When I brought Flores home with me, after the death of his parents," began Mr. Briscoe, rather abruptly, "I meant not only to make him my heir, but to fit him for the position of an escort and protector to Ninada when she should go forth into the world. This," he said, addressing Van directly, "was before I dreamed that I should be allowed by the governor and his council to share my wealth with such of my own blood as might be living in my native country.

"But I was disappointed in Flores," he went on with a tone of sadness. "As he grew up certain inherited traits, such as deceitfulness, a revengeful disposition, and a set determination that all things should yield to *his* imperious will, began to develop themselves. So when, in return for a certain favor done the governor, the edict was issued allowing me to share as I have said (on condition that I myself always remain in Itambez), I wrote the letter intended for my brother, and at the same time told Flores what I had done."



"But does he know that Cousin Van is to inherit—that is, to carry back to his own land—a share of your riches, father?" eagerly asked Ninada.

"I did not tell that—no," returned Mr. Briscoe; "nor that, instead of being my heir, as Flores expected, I should make different arrangements——"

"Hark!" said Van, suddenly springing to his feet. "I certainly heard someone breathing heavily."

Mr. Briscoe rose, and, stepping into the passage, listened.

As he stood there a low hiss was heard, and a glittering coral snake glided from the nearest of the branching avenues into full sight. Seeing a human form it crept back with another hiss.

"It was a coral snake, the 'treasure guardian' as the Incas considered them," remarked Mr. Briscoe, resuming his seat with an air of relief. "The first branching passage has a concealed outlet in the garden, and the snake probably entered that way."

Then he went on :

"As I was about to say, I simply told Flores that I could never trust him with the care of so precious a thing as my daughter, and that he must give up all idea of accompanying her to my native country, as well as certain other hopes that only lately I discovered he was presumptuous enough to entertain—eh, Ninada?"

But Ninada, with crimsoning cheeks, only cast her dark eyes downward, and again the peculiar sound was heard in the passage, this time, however, attracting no particular attention.

Having finished speaking, Mr. Briscoe rose, and,



applying a rather peculiar looking key to the lock of the coffer on which he had been sitting, threw back the lid.

Well might Van open his eyes, as Mr. Briscoe beckoned him to his side. The chest was full to the brim of great golden coins.

"I only show you this—and this," said Mr. Briscoe, opening another of the coffers, each of which was about four feet square, "to give you an idea of the wealth it is possible to accumulate in this remarkable country. And yet, as compared with thousands in the city, I am only comfortably well off."

"Comfortably well off." Van made a very rough mental calculation as to the number of gold pieces a box four feet square might contain, and in a dazed sort of way rubbed his eyes and wondered if his uncle was not laughing at him.

If Mr. Briscoe was not thus doing in a metaphorical sense, Ninada was in a literal one. To her eyes there was nothing out of the ordinary in the sight of such great possessions, and Van's amazement seemed something very amusing.

"Wait, Cousin Van," she said, while her beautiful face dimpled with smiles, "there is something more to come."

There was indeed! Four coffers of coin were displayed, and a fifth filled with vases, cups, and strange ornaments, which, Mr. Briscoe explained, were found just as he saw them when he first discovered the secret treasure room.

The lid of the sixth being thrown back disclosed an upper tray divided into compartments. And an invol-



untary cry escaped Van's lips as in each he saw little heaps of cut and uncut gems.

There were sapphires and emeralds, whose possession a queen might envy; moonstones like drops of petrified water, holding the rays of a tropic moon in their depths; opals with their hearts of fire, golden beryls, rubies of wonderful size and depth of coloring, and pearls which centuries before had been brought from the Pacific coast.

The middle compartment of the tray was somewhat larger than the rest. And Van was mute with amazement as his eyes rested on its glittering contents, consisting entirely of diamonds.

Diamonds in size from a seed pearl to half a hazel nut; straw colored and slightly rose tinted stones, bluish white and greenish pink—all these "off color stones" lay carelessly intermingled with a far greater number of gems of the "purest ray serene."

"Much of my wealth came through my wife," said Mr. Briscoe quietly, when Van had somewhat exhausted his raptures. "Speaking from an American point of view, I am not exaggerating when I tell you that I do not know how much commercial value all this represents."

"I don't see how you *can* know," exclaimed Van, wondering to what huge figures his uncle's wealth would amount.

Mr. Briscoe, without replying, took from a separate compartment a small box of curiously chased silver, which he extended to Van.

"That contains diamonds, Van," he said kindly, "and I think you will find on your return to America



that the sum received from their sale will give you a tolerable start in life. This share of my wealth, small as it is, is your inheritance, if so you choose to call it."

Van tried to speak, but somehow the right words would not come. Truth to tell, he was so overpowered with all he had seen and heard as to be quite incapable of any connected speech.

"Never mind, Cousin Van—we understand," laughed Ninada, who easily comprehended the reasons for Van's awkward silence.

And then after a little more talk the trio returned to the upper air.

They did not know *then* that Flores, concealed in the subterranean passage leading from the treasure room to the garden, had seen and heard all that had passed.

It was not unnatural to suppose that while the proposed journey from Itambez would not be nearly as lengthy, it would not be without dangers and hardships corresponding to those encountered by Van and his companions.

Taking this fact into consideration, Van felt certain of one or the other of two things, either Mr. Briscoe actually shared the belief in the prediction which had been made regarding the threatened danger to his daughter unless she left Itambez before her sixteenth birthday, or else he was moved by some more practical and weightier reasons, only known to himself. Nothing else—even his avowed purpose of giving Ninada the social and educational advantages mentioned—could account for subjecting his daughter to a journey fraught with so much possible peril.

But I need hardly say that the prospect of acting as



guide and protector to the young girl filled Van's heart with gladness. It more than reconciled him to the thought of leaving this lovely spot where he would willingly have been content to stay.

But Mr. Briscoe spoke very plainly as to this latter half expressed thought of his nephew's.

"Itambez is only a city for the dreamer—for the young man or woman who is content to live a life of listless ease, without care or thought for the future," he said, gravely, "and that is one of the reasons I have for sending Ninada away——"

"But only for a little time, father," quickly interposed his daughter, bending her dark eyes on his face, as though she would read his deeper and more secret thoughts.

"Only for a little time, Ninada," repeated her father, but there was a shadow of sadness in his voice which caused Van, who was walking nervously to and fro on the stone flagging, to glance at him curiously.

The evening was warm, with a heavy odor of the flowering shrubs everywhere present. Ninada, in her soft, white robes, stood beside her father, dreamily looking out into the deepening twilight. Here and there among her heavy braids she had placed fire-flies in little gauze inclosures, and these emitted dull sparks of greenish golden light like living jewels.

Van himself felt the force of his uncle's remark. He was beginning to rouse himself from his dreamy existence, and to remember that life is given for action, not repose.

That the return should be made by the Canuma river, and thence to and down the Amazon to Para, was of



course decided upon, as the overland route to Arica or Callao would be a hundredfold more difficult and dangerous.

To Van's surprise he found out that Mr. Briscoe had for more than a fortnight been perfecting his plans for the purposed journey. Manola—Ninada's nurse and body servant—had refused to be separated from her foster child. She unhesitatingly consented to accompany her to the unknown country after a long private interview with her master, who perhaps told her more than was known to Van or Ninada herself.

The negro Tom had also been induced to make one of the party as far as the Amazon, where it was expected they would fall in with one of the large trading boats descending the river. Martin had steadfastly but respectfully refused to leave the city limits, so his own valuable services were not to be had, greatly to Van's expressed regret.

"It does not matter," said a voice suddenly speaking out of the half darkness close beside them. "I myself have decided to leave Itambez, and shall ask permission to make one of the party."

The speaker was Flores.



## CHAPTER XX.

## PREPARATIONS FOR THE JOURNEY.

FLORES's unexpected announcement caused quite a sensation among his hearers, who were considerably astonished by his cold audacity. Mr. Briscoe was the first to speak.

"As your guardian, Flores," he said. "I simply advise you to put this foolish fancy out of your head. I certainly shall never give my consent to anything of the kind."

"I shall go without it, then," was the unmoved reply, "and as you have seen fit to intrust your daughter to the care of a stranger of whom you know only what he chooses to tell you, perhaps there is more need that I should be near her to watch over her safety."

The cool insolence of this remarkable assertion caused Van's face to crimson with anger. A hasty reply rose to his lips, which was as quickly checked by the gentle touch of Ninada's fingers.

"My father and myself have chosen both a protector and companion in my cousin—we ask no other, Flores," she proudly responded.

"Well said, my daughter," was Mr. Briscoe's calm remark. "So, Flores, you see that Ninada's safety will be insured without your valuable services."



"But I shall go," said Flores, in the same defiant manner.

"You forget that the wealth left by your parents is in my hands," sharply returned his guardian, "and I certainly shall not relinquish it till you are of lawful age, which in this province will be when you reach your nineteenth year."

"I forget nothing," said Flores, in a voice which suggested far more than the words themselves—"what I have said, I have said."

An awkward silence ensued. Van and Ninada did not know what to say while Mr. Briscoe, perplexed and angry, was trying to keep back the sharp words he was tempted to utter.

"Flores," he began finally, and his voice took on a sort of pathos that Van had never before noticed. "I have tried in all ways to do for you as my very own, but you have disappointed my expectations—I do not need to tell you how. If you had turned out differently I should willingly have bidden you God speed and allowed you to accompany Ninada. As it is—with your unbridled, self-indulgent nature—I do not speak of other faults—it would be sending you to your own destruction—you cannot go!"

"But I will!" was the sullen response.

Again Van was strangely conscious of the indefinable shadowy presence—if presence it can be called—that he had noticed when a few evenings before Flores had made a certain threatening gesture, yet nothing could be seen in the soft tropic darkness.

But a sigh was breathed on the night stillness which certainly had not escaped the lips of any of the four.



"*You hear, Flores ?*" remarked Mr. Briscoe, in a tone of quiet significance.

"I hear," returned Flores, but without the slightest change in tone or manner, and this time it was Mr. Briscoe who sighed.

"Flores," he said, gently laying his hand on the young man's shoulder, "do you remember that when dying your mother told you if it was possible she should watch over you in spirit——"

What a smothered exclamation of anger or impatience, Flores shook off the kindly touch, and turning abruptly left the veranda.

"We must manage it so that Flores will not know how and when we leave Itambez," said Van, speaking for the first time, "for he seems determined to force himself upon us."

"That can be easily managed," returned Mr. Briscoe, and the unpleasant topic was dropped for the time by common consent.

The days flew on with more than ordinary swiftness as the appointed time of departure drew near. Aided to some extent by the descriptions given both by Mr. Briscoe and Van, Manola, who was skillful with the needle, prepared a few garments more suited for the travel before them than those worn habitually by Ninada and herself. In Para an outfit for the anticipated voyage by steamer to America could easily be obtained for them all.

It was understood that on arrival in America Van should place Ninada, in the care of Captain Peters's unmarried sister, who lived near Boston. Van had made his home with her previous to entering the school ship,



and knew how gladly she would receive the beautiful motherless girl after learning her romantic history.

To this lady, whom he had known in other days, Mr. Briscoe had written a long letter of explanation and instruction, the contents of which were only known to himself; which letter, duly sealed, was intrusted to Ninada's keeping.

As in the case of Van himself, Ninada was to be provided with abundant means in the form of precious stones, from the sale of which her income would arise.

What amount would thus be taken, Van neither knew nor cared. He was well aware that Mr. Briscoe would supply his daughter lavishly, and though he himself was ignorant of the relative value of such things, he felt sure that the sparkling stones given him by his uncle, and subsequently transferred to his money belt, were worth a very large sum of money.

As to the duration of Ninada's stay, Mr. Briscoe spoke evasively. It depended, he said, partly upon herself. She would know in due time, and further than that he would not say.

All this was kept secret from Flores, who seemed to notice nothing out of the ordinary. He was absent from the house much of the time, coming and going at will. Whether he had given up his firmly asserted resolve, or whether he was biding his time, was best known to himself.

Known only to themselves too, were the feelings of Ninada and Mr. Briscoe as to their coming separation; but as I have said, strong emotions never came to the surface among the people of Itambez. Ninada herself, believing the parting to be but temporary, did not of



course feel it so deeply as her father, who himself was in a state of anxious uncertainty regarding the matter, though he seldom spoke of it.

And all this time Escomada kept up its undertone of grumbling, its puffs of smoke by day, and the lurid glow of its peak by night. Yet as with the people of Pompeii and Herculaneum, those of Itambezi ate, drank and were merry in their indolent, dreamy way—married and were given in marriage. The ancient records showed that every generation for centuries had witnessed similar volcanic phenomena at periodic intervals, yet nothing like a serious eruption of the fire mountain had ever taken place.

True, the wise men were predicting something disastrous during the then present year, yet their daily lives went on as usual. The truth is, the people of Itambez were fatalists in the strongest sense of the word.

“What is written is written,” might be called their watchword, and so they drifted on with the dreamy days.



## CHAPTER XXI

## A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

MIDNIGHT in Itambez! The glowing shield of the moon was showing its face over the mountain crests, bathing them in a sheen of silver that swept down the green slopes into the valley and city below, as the queen of night rose higher in the blue black of the arching sky.

Street, courtyard and dwelling alike were flooded with an almost noonday splendor without its glare; yet such was the silence, that it was like a city of the dead.

On the river side close to the great stone bridge which spans the swift-flowing Canuma, a little company were assembled—a most unusual sight at such an hour.

Drawn up to the edge of the granite walled embankment was a *balsa* or raft, of narrower build than those usually seen in South American waters, and slightly rounded at both ends. Near the bow and stern were two quite commodious cabins with arching roof. In one of these a number of necessaries as for a prolonged voyage were being placed by a couple of lithe, olive-complexioned men, whose peculiar dress and cast of features showed that they belonged to one of the river tribes of the Itambezi provinces. Four others stood silently apart, awaiting orders from the master or helmsman, who, stationed at the stern, held the shaft of the long steering oar in his muscular hands ready for action.



Assembled on the embankment itself was a little group of a different nationality. Mr. Briscoe and his daughter, standing somewhat apart, were speaking together the last words of farewell, which were too sacred to be recorded.

Van, whose cool white linen suit had been discarded for something better suited for what lay before him, was talking with Martin, while Tom, the negro, a little distance away, was relieving Manola, a resolute looking middle-aged woman of more than ordinary intelligence, of a number of wraps which were to be placed on the raft.

"I should like to have said good-bye to Flores," Van was saying, "for though I seem to have gained his ill will I certainly bear him none."

Martin shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps it's better as it is," he returned. "That Flores is a bad lot, take him at his best, and if, as he swears he will do, he ever *does* get to America, the Lord help him, he'll be likely to kill some one or get killed, before he's been there twenty-four hours."

"Look here, Martin," said Van, lowering his voice as a sudden thought occurred to him. "About this volcano business—do *you* anticipate anything more dangerous than the slight eruptions Escomada seems to have had from time to time?"

"Who knows?" was the careless reply. "I am willing to take the chances, anyway."

"So, too, is my uncle, apparently," Van responded.

"Ah, but it is very different with him," said Martin, "for he is bound by the solemn oath of the temple never to leave Itambez, and even if he wasn't, I very much



doubt whether he would go under any circumstances for another reason."

"What is that?" curiously asked Van.

"He hopes and expects—with good reason, too—to be made governor of the province if Xalaqua resigns another year by reason of his age as is expected, and——"

But Martin's speech was brought to a conclusion by the approach of Mr. Briscoe and Ninada. Both were very pale, but calm and outwardly composed. Martin drew back respectfully as Mr. Briscoe took his nephew by the hand.

"You know all I would say, Van," he said in a voice of repressed emotion, "only remember I am trusting what is far dearer than my own life into your hands, and—and—should anything occur that Ninada never comes back to Itambez, she must look to you as a protector. May God bless and keep you both."

"I will be faithful to my trust," was the solemm reply, and Mr. Briscoe saw in the young man's earnest, resolute features that this was no form of idle words.

The last farewells were spoken, and the little party stepped on board the raft, the fasts were loosed, and its head pushed out into the swift current of the stream.

The scene was indelibly photographed upon Van's memory. The buoyant raft gathering increasing headway as two rude sweeps were manned by four of the crew, who began a strangely pathetic chant in their own language. Ninada, standing by her nurse with a look of dejection on her beautiful face as her tear-dimmed eyes were strained to catch the last glimpse of her father, who remained leaning against the stone parapet of the bridge, his dark figure outlined against



the solemn looking white buildings, while river and city alike were bathed in the wonderful moonlight glow.

On and still on between the stone embankments lined with the homes of the sleeping city, and before them loomed the great arch in the city wall through which the Canuma swept the raft with ever increasing strength.

"*Adiosa, Itambez,*" exclaimed Manola with streaming eyes, stretching out her arms toward the receding city.

"*Adiosa, Itambez, poro pocita tiemporate,*" (Adieu, Itambez, for a little time), whispered Ninada, insensibly dropping into the familiar tongue of her people, and as was perhaps natural, betraying less sorrow than Manola.

"Good-bye, Itambez," murmured Van, himself not unmoved by the strangely weird beauty of the scene, while Tom alone showed no particular signs of emotion in any direction.

The start had been made at midnight for two reasons. One was that Mr. Briscoe wished as far as possible to keep the departure of the party from being made public. The other, to throw Flores off the track. And to this latter end Flores had been dispatched that afternoon with message to the overseer of a small sugar plantation in the suburbs, owned by Mr. Briscoe. And so, as the raft swept onward between little outlying villages and hamlets, Tom and Van stood alternate watches till morning, while Manola and her foster child retired to their tiny cabin, where they were lulled to rest by the ripple of the water and the low chant of the oarsman.

The sun was just touching the surrounding peaks



with a glitter of crimson glory when the raft entered a mountain gorge where the river began making its exit from the great basin of Itambezi.

Refreshed by a few hours of the unbroken sleep of superb health, Ninada came on deck—if the expression is allowable—and Van could hardly repress an admiring exclamation as he turned to meet her.

For the young girl had donned a dress of soft gray *vicuna* cloth reaching to her ankles, which, by no means unlike the plain yet pretty yachting suits of the present day, set off her erect, well proportioned figure to the best advantage.

Perhaps Van's eyes expressed his admiration as plainly as his lips could have done, for Ninada blushed very prettily as she extended her hand to him in her usual frank, unaffected manner.

But there was no attempt just then at conversation.

Higher and higher the walls of a great canyon were closing in about the river, whose foaming current was bearing the raft onward with inconceivable rapidity.

The roaring of the torrent echoing from the sides of the great rift through the mountain was almost deafening. Hundreds of feet above them rose the irregular masses of granite through which during countless ages the Canuma had worn its way.

There were few bends in the river, so that the sturdy helmsman had but little trouble in keeping the raft in the very middle of the current, which Van thinks at the lowest calculation must have sent them along at the rate of twenty miles an hour. As he has since said, it was among the most wonderful experiences of the whole of his South American journeying.



At the end of an hour the canyon widened, while at the same time the rocky walls on either hand began lessening gradually in height, till with a startling suddenness the raft shot out from the gloomy canyon into the dazzling sunlight.

On either side of the river lay the smooth table lands blending hazily in the distance with the wooded districts about Canuma Lake.

One of the younger looking of the Indian crew now separated himself from the others and coolly walked toward the part of the raft where Van, standing beside Ninada, was pointing out the peculiar features of the scenery.

Rather to the astonishment of the two, the young man, kneeling down on the edge of the raft, proceeded to wash his face and hands with rather more energy than the Indian races display in ablutions. Then, standing erect, he turned toward them.

“Flores!” exclaimed Ninada, but Van himself could not speak for indignation.



## CHAPTER XXII.

## A FRIENDLY PRIEST.

"FLORES—very much at your service," responded the unabashed youth, who, having washed the coppery stains from his skin, smiled graciously upon Ninada, and rather maliciously at Van.

"How could you deceive my father so?" said Ninada, indignantly facing him.

"How deceive him—did I not say that I should go?" was the imperturbable reply.

It was one of those awkward situations which seem difficult to evade. True, Flores could have been forcibly put on shore, but who would take the authority of so doing? Not Van surely, who was only a nominal commander, for Flores's guardian had hired the raft and crew and made all the other arrangements. Then, too, an open rupture was to be avoided as far as possible.

"Look here, Flores," said Van, firmly. "It isn't for me to say whether you are to accompany us or not, but remember this—I am in charge here by the wish of my uncle and shall resent the slightest attempt at interference."

"I will remember," answered Flores, in a voice of peculiar smoothness which was belied by the angry



flash of his dark eyes. And then entering the small cabin intended for the crew, he proceeded to resume his usual apparel, while Ninada turned an anxious and perplexed face toward her cousin.

"There will be trouble, Cousin Van," she whispered, but Van reassured her as best he could, and the approach of Manola with her young mistress's breakfast, which had been prepared over a coal brazier, prevented further conversation just then.

Every luxury and dainty that Itambez could furnish, from plovers' eggs for omelettes to delicate ortolans prepared for the spit, had been provided by the thoughtfulness of Mr. Briscoe, together with abundance of more substantial food for the crew. Van's gun and the one purchased at Para for Tom had been placed on board, with a plentiful supply of ammunition and fishing tackle, so that fresh game and fish were readily obtainable as on the preceding voyage.

The unwelcome intrusion of Flores was the one drawback to the pleasure of a river voyage in the companionship of his beautiful cousin, and Van could only devoutly hope that all would go well till in some way they were relieved of his presence.

And so the raft kept on her winding way, the only incident of note being that on the third day after leaving the canyon, recurrent earthquake shocks were felt, accompanied by the subterranean rumbling Van had before heard, together with a strange smoky darkness which for a time completely obscured the sun. That it was a more severe eruption of Escomada than had yet been witnessed, Van felt sure. How severe it might be he could only conjecture from the appearance of the



immense column of flame and a strange fiery glow which shone from and around the distant cone of the volcano all that night.

Fortunately, Ninada seemed to regard the phenomena as she had those which accompanied the lighter eruptions she herself had witnessed, and nothing was said by any one to arouse her uneasiness.

And though the semi-obscurity of the atmosphere, together with occasional mutterings in the bowels of the earth, was noticeable nearly all the following day, Ninada was so taken up with the new revelations of beauty which each succeeding hour brought to her notice, that all else was for the time forgotten.

For if Van, who himself had heard and read of the wonders of tropic scenery, had found it so far beyond his most eager anticipations, think what it must have been to this young girl whose secluded, shut-in life had given her so little idea of what lay beyond !

Whether Flores was equally delighted and surprised was best known to himself. His handsome impassive face kept its usual composure through everything. Moreover, he showed a very evident desire to hold himself aloof from Van and Ninada in their conversation. Yet Van could but notice that by day or night he contrived to keep within earshot of them, thereby preventing many a pleasant *tete-a-tete*. When addressed, he answered briefly in the same old smooth even tones Van instinctively distrusted, but he seldom talked freely with either.

“Dat young chap studyin’ up some kind ob debilry for sure,” was Tom’s muttered admonition more than once—for Martin had confided to his colored associate



more than one little peculiarity of Flores, which was unknown to Van himself.

Flores was silent concerning his intentions in visiting America or what he purposed doing there. That he had probably secretly supplied himself with jewels from those in his guardian's keeping Van knew there could be but little doubt, as he would of course not enter upon such a venture without being abundantly provided with means.

But the days flew by with their constantly changing panorama of scenery and passing events, yet Flores kept his own counsel and preserved his unruffled composure as at first, till Van began to fancy that they had perhaps misjudged him after all.

Not so Ninada, who, with her nurse Manola seemed to cherish a vague distrust to which they could give no name. And so, sometimes aided by favoring breezes, the raft was swept ever onward toward the mighty Amazon by the swift or sluggish current as the case might be. Canuma Lake was entered and crossed—the respective districts of the diminutive Pocotas and the dangerous Mumurus passed without encountering a member of either tribe, while later, the flooded forests and white trunked rubber districts were left behind.

No incident worthy of mention occurred till Atlaxa—the native village at the junction of the Canuma with the Uraria—was reached, where, according to agreement with Mr. Briscoe, the services of the raftsmen ended. The raft was if possible to be exchanged for a large boat, in which the Itambez Indians were to make their return to the province, accompanied by Tom.

Atlaxa was a primitive settlement with mixed popula-



tion of Indians, native Brazilians and *Mameluccos*, its only business being the cultivation of the *cacao* or chocolate of commerce. There, by waiting a few days, the little party were sure of engaging passage down the Amazon in one of the large trading boats which at that season were about returning to Para from the rubber and *cacao* districts above Atlaxa.

Prominent among the little crowd of curious idlers who had hurried down to the rude pier on the arrival of the raft, was a portly, smooth shaven man, whose wide-brimmed "shovel" hat rolled up at the sides, and flowing cassock of cool linen at once betokened his priestly office.

Van, who had picked up a few Spanish phrases from Tom, at once addressed himself to the *padre* :

"*Habla usted español ?*"—(do you speak Spanish?)

The good father's eye twinkled with a suggestion of humor as he extended a plump white hand.

"Sure I speak it like a native, but it's your own talk I'd prefer greatly, my son," he said in a rich rollicking voice, which, with a slight suggestion of the brogue, at once betrayed his nationality.

Delighted beyond measure at the unexpected meeting, Van hastily mentioned their purpose of stopping at Atlaxa, pending the arrival of a trading boat.

But the *padre* scarcely waited for him to conclude.

"My dwelling and all in it is yours and thankful I am to see a white face—especially such a charming one as the young lady has," he added, doffing his hat with a respectfully admiring glance at Ninada.

A very few moments sufficed to set the entire party at their ease. Tom remained on the raft and saw that



the proper luggage was taken ashore and conveyed to the house of Father Felix, who himself accompanied his guests up through a long shady walk to what he was pleased to call "his little place."

It was a rambling, one story building covering a considerable extent of ground, with a wide veranda on either side. The wattled uprights were smoothly plastered inside and out with a clayey cement, which after hardening was thoroughly whitewashed, while the watertight roof was plaited palm thatch.

Hammocks hung in the verandas, the windows were destitute of glass, mosquito bars in every room, and the kitchen by itself in a covered shed at the rear, where half a dozen colored servants of both sexes were chattering and singing.

That Ninada was the daughter of an American gentleman in the far interior on her way to the United States for the purpose of educational advantages, Van, who for the time constituted himself spokesman of the party, deemed enough to explain without going into unnecessary detail. His own presence and that of Flores he accounted for satisfactorily, and Father Felix was too much delighted at this break in his monotonous life to be unduly inquisitive.

He himself had been sent to Atlaxa from the Catholic mission at Para nearly twenty years before and had never left the settlement even for a day since.

"I hope I've managed to do some little good among 'em," he said in the course of conversation, "but it's a hard soil for seed sowing. There's half Spanish Injuns within half a mile of the mission chapel, that would think no more of taking a human life for pay, than of



shooting a toucan or parrot wid one of their blow guns that'll carry a pisened arrer fifty yards 'asy. And fu'ther back, there's reg'lar haythen cannible blacks, and so it goes."

Ninada, who was delighted with the kindly visaged priest and his novel surroundings, had listened to his explanations with eager interest, and Flores with a seemingly polite indifference.

The young girl herself, anxious to know and learn everything relating to the teachings and religions of the world into which she was so soon to enter, questioned Father Felix as to his work, and a friendly feeling at once sprang up between them.

Flores carelessly asked something about the Spanish Indians who used the blow guns and what the tribe was called, after which he strolled listlessly out on the veranda, where a short time after he entered into conversation with a *Mestizo*, who was employed by Father Felix in cultivating the little *cacao* plantation back of the house, which itself was embowered in tropic shade.

Meanwhile Van had been making arrangements for exchanging the raft for a large, strongly built river boat, in which the Itambez Indians, accompanied by Tom, were to retrace their way back up river to their native province. Tom himself refused to leave Atlaxa till he had seen the little party safely on board some boat bound down the Amazon.

"I tell you dat Flores studyin' up sometin'—him keep mighty close to hisself, and whilst I can, I'm goin' to keep my eye onto him," he said—and Van's laughing remonstrance to the contrary had no effect whatever.

By rare good luck, on the morning of the fifth day



after the travelers' arrival, a small iron steamer from Bara, a hundred miles further up river, touched at Atlaxa to complete her loading.

Van had no difficulty in arranging with her captain, a shrewd, sharp visaged Scotchman, for a passage for his party to Para. The steamer was to leave for that port the following day.

He was about returning to Father Felix's to announce the news, when a canoe, paddled by one man, shot alongside the rude pier. In the haggard, travel-worn occupant, whose clothing hung in rags about his emaciated figure, Van recognized, with an astonishment too great for utterance, Quipo the runner, his former guide to the city of Itambez!

Before Van could accost him, the man glanced quickly in his face, and then, sinking on his knees, touched his forehead to the earth. Van, recognizing the sign, knew that something terrible had happened.

"Speak, Quipo—what is it?" he hoarsely exclaimed, with a sudden presentiment of what was coming.

"The saying of the wise men has come true. Escomada has vomited forth flame and smoke and rivers of fire, till the great city is no more, and the province itself is laid waste," replied Quipo, with a certain solemn pathos which was more forcible than any wild demonstration of grief.

"My uncle," gasped Van, "did he escape?"

Quipo sorrowfully shook his head.

"Thousands have perished, and among them was Xalaqua our governor and the good chief magistrate," was the sad reply.

Further questioning drew from Quipo the following



facts : Three days after the party left Itambez, suddenly and without a moment's warning, Escomada belched from its crater a flood of fiery lava, which poured down the declivity and swept all before it. That part of the city on the lower slope, where Mr. Briscoe's dwelling had stood, was destroyed in the twinkling of an eye, and thousands of persons were swept into eternity. Quipo, with some few others, had made their escape by the river, and the former had traveled day and night to bring the terrible news of her father's fate to Ninada, if perchance he might be fortunate enough to reach Atlaxa before her departure.

In a state of great mental agitation Van took Quipo to one of the houses of the settlement for needed rest and refreshment, bidding him say nothing to any one until he saw him again.

For though the runner was positive that Mr. Briscoe was among those who had perished, he had not personally witnessed his death. According to Van's reasoning, it would be cruel to break such intelligence to Ninada without more positive evidence.

Full of perplexity and disquiet, Van returned to Father Felix's house, and stepped up on the wide veranda, where Ninada, true to her tropic nature, was reclining in one of the hammocks, languidly waving a fan of gorgeously tinted feathers.

"Well, Ninada," said Van, trying to speak lightly, "you can let Manola pack your things again. I have arranged for a passage for us all to Para on board the little steamer that came in this morning and will leave to-night."

"Is Flores to go?" asked the young girl abruptly as



Van seated himself on a rawhide stool beside her.

“Why—yes,” returned Van, devoutly wishing he could reply in the negative.

“I can only say that I am sorry, Cousin Van,” was the quiet reply ; “for I am convinced that he means harm—to you.”

And then, for the first time since leaving Itambez, the two talked on through the delightful afternoon. They were freed from the prying presence of Flores, who had taken Van’s gun and wandered off in the forest, as he had done a number of times since they had reached Atlaxa.

“Where can Flores be?” suddenly exclaimed Van, as he saw the sun drawing down toward the horizon. “I must hunt him up—and Tom, too.”

“Good-bye, Cousin Van,” said the young girl as Van rose up to his feet, and moved by some strange impulse, their hands met in a long lingering clasp, as though a separation lay before them.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

## THE POISONED ARROW.

ROUSING Tom, who was comfortably dozing in the sun a little way from the veranda, Van in a few brief words communicated the terrible intelligence he had received from Quipo.

"You will have to go with us to Para now, Tom," he said, as the negro stood aghast, "but mind that Miss Ninada knows nothing of this at present. I want to talk with Quipo again before I decide what to do."

"And *I* wants for to talk wid him afore *I* decides, Mist' Briscoe," returned Tom.

Directing him to the little inn, where he had left Quipo, Van inquired of a bystander which direction Flores had taken.

"*Por este camino,*" (this way) was the reply, and then, in a mixture of broken English and Spanish, Van's informant directed him to follow a path through the underbrush, till he came to the edge of a swamp some half a mile away. There probably Flores would be found, as there was plenty of small game in the vicinity.

Thus directed, Van walked rapidly forward, and a moment later found himself in the gloomy depths of a thick forest. The path was narrow, but well beaten and free from underbrush; so Van, having no fears of



losing himself, hurried on, anxious not only to notify Flores of their approaching departure, but of the almost incredible news brought by the runner from Itambez.

Now while Van had been enjoying his long interview with Ninada, Flores was very differently employed.

Half a mile away in the depths of the forest, he was sitting on a fallen tree trunk near the swamp, with Van's gun resting upon his knees. He was silently watching the movements of a half-naked copper-colored Indian with a low retreating forehead, straight, black hair, and a face expressive of brutal cunning.

The latter had thrown off his tattered blanket and wore nothing but a pair of very short and dilapidated tow trousers. He was industriously scraping the bark of a woody plant known as the *mavacure*. The fibers thus detached he carefully placed in a tunnel of palm leaves, and, pouring some dark liquid over the whole, allowed it to filter drop by drop into a clay vessel underneath the tunnel.

The juice thus procured was mixed with a sticky infusion. Then, taking from a rude bench beside him half a dozen palm splints, of which one end was wound round with the cotton of the silk tree, while the other was sharp pointed, the Indian carefully dipped each arrow tip in the glutinous preparation, and his work was done.

Signing to Flores to give attention, the savage reached out for his blow gun that was leaning against the hut. This was a hollow cane some eight feet long, the inside of which had been smoothed till it was almost like glass. Placing one of the arrows in the larger end, the Indian, after looking round, elevated the blow



gun in both hands and placed his mouth at the aperture, at the same time suddenly exhaling his breath.

A slight rustling in the tree tops, where the arrow had sped, called Flores's attention. A moment of silence followed. Then, clutching painfully at the leaves and branches as he came down, a small monkey fell to the ground—dead!

Flores drew a long breath and nodded expressively at the Indian, who gave a grim sort of smile. "*Manana*" (to-morrow) said the former briefly, and whatever the time appointed might signify, it was evidently well understood by the Indian.

Suddenly ringing through the forest glades came a clear-long-drawn call.

"Flo-res!"

The young man, whose face suddenly took on an ashy pallor, sprang to his feet, and stood with parted lips and staring eyes gazing in the direction of the distant shout.

Another repetition of the call, and Flores, seeming to recognize Van's familiar voice, pulled himself together.

"It is Van," he muttered, wiping the sudden perspiration from his forehead. "I almost thought——"

"*Signor*," whispered the Indian, bending his small glittering eyes upon Flores, as he thrust another arrow into the blow gun, "*es Americano?*" (Is it the American?)

Flores nodded.

"*No manana ahora*," (not to-morrow—now) returned the Indian, and, before the other could speak, he glided away into the underbrush.

Flores, whose usually motionless face still retained



the deathly paleness of a moment ago, hesitated a brief while as he heard Van's footsteps approaching nearer. His features were working convulsively, as though some inward struggle were going on.

But his hesitation was only momentary. Turning, he plunged into the dense underbrush, which surrounded a little open glade where the footpath ended abruptly.

Parting the leaves, he peered out, as Van, unconscious of evil, came hurrying along, looking anxiously about him for the object of his search.

Reaching the opening, he stopped and again called Flores by name, but only the echo from the forest depths replied.

"Poof!"

A slight sound, as of a person suddenly expelling his breath, was heard. As Van turned inquiringly, something like a toy dart, impelled by some unseen force, made a tiny wound on his left arm just above the elbow, and fell to the ground.

"Why, what under the sun is *that*?" Van exclaimed, glancing down at the arrow. Then, pushing up his sleeve, he saw a drop or two of blood issuing from the slight puncture, but at the same moment a sudden dizziness came over him, accompanied by a terrible feeling of nausea, while a filmy cloud passed across his vision.

"Flores!" he called, blindly throwing out his arms, and as the hidden spectator cowered back in his leafy covert, Van staggered and fell to the ground. To all intent and purpose he was as lifeless as though a rifle ball had pierced his heart.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

## DOWN THE AMAZON.

TEN minutes after Van had been struck by the poisoned arrow, Flores sauntered into the inclosure before Father Felix's dwelling—coming, as Ninada noticed, in an entirely opposite direction from that taken by Van.

“Did you not meet my cousin Van?” she asked anxiously. “He has engaged passage for us in the little steamer that leaves this evening, and went in search of you.”

“Seen Van—why, no,” was the reply, in a tone of seeming surprise.

“You are quite sure?” persisted Ninada, fixing her deep, dark eyes steadily upon his own. Despite Flores's perfect self-control, his gaze fell before that of the young girl.

“Did you ever know me to tell you what was not true?” he returned, with a show of haughtiness which Ninada knew almost instinctively to be assumed.

Before she could reply, Tom came hurrying up to the veranda.

“Whar's Mist' Briscoe? I wants to tell him I'se changed my mind and is goin' down to Para along of the party 'stid of back to Itambe,” he said, addressing himself to Ninada, and glancing inquiringly about him.

“*You* going?” blankly returned Flores, who by no



means relished the idea. Ninada's anxious face lighted visibly, for she had a real liking for the negro, who on his own part regarded the young girl with something not far removed from devotion.

"Cap'n McGrath says everything must be aboard by sundown," said Father Felix, who, very disconsolate at losing his guests, made his appearance from the house before any answer could be returned to Tom's question, "But where's young Mr. Briscoe?" he asked.

Ninada explained that Van had gone in search of Flores, and probably taken the wrong path. It was thought best to hunt him up at once, while some of Father Felix's servants were carrying the various articles down to the steamer.

Tucking his cassock about his sturdy limbs, the worthy priest led the way, followed by Tom. Flores remained behind—as he said—to see that everything was in readiness for getting away as soon as Van returned.

"I hope nothin' has happ'ned to the lad," rather anxiously remarked Father Felix, who had shouted Van's name till he was hoarse; "but upon my word I'm beginnin' to feel a bit un'asy, for——"

A cry from Tom interrupted his further speech. Pushing rudely past the good priest, the negro darted into the little clearing, where he dropped on his knees beside poor Van's insensible form.

"The saints be merciful!" exclaimed Father Felix, turning quite pale as he hurried forward.

Suddenly his eyes fell upon the arrow lying on the short grass, and he uttered a groan as he glanced from it to Van's rigid, set face and staring eyes.



“P’isened wid one o’ thim blow gun arrers—oh the murtherin’ cannibals!” he groaned, and covering his fat face with his hands, Father Felix, who was very tender-hearted, sobbed audibly.

But the negro, only half realizing what had happened, raised the young man in his muscular arms as though he were a child.

“Good Lord, Fader Felix!” he gasped, “dis yer boy mus’ be got out o’ dis—he’s only swoounded like!” and without awaiting any response from the priest, he started back at a run, carrying his heavy burden with seeming ease. He was followed at a slower pace by the priest, whose rubicund visage was streaked with tears and perspiration.

“What has happened?” exclaimed Ninada, in a voice of repressed fear, as, accompanied by Manola, she ran down the steps of the veranda to meet the gigantic negro. Breathless and panting, Tom deposited the senseless form tenderly on the green sward under a silk cotton tree.

“He—he’s fainted, I reck’n, Miss Ninada,” panted the black. “Tell ’em ter bring some lickor or somefin.”

A half breed native servant of the priest’s, who had stepped from the house, strode to the spot where Ninada, with white, anguish-stricken face and clasped hands, was kneeling beside her cousin.

Peering into the rigid features, he pushed up Van’s sleeve. As his eyes fell on the tiny wound, about which a bluish tint was gathering, he shook his head.

“Him dead—killed wid pisen arrow!” said the native, rising to his feet, and looking accidentally or



purposely into the blanched face of Flores, who stood a little way off. "I *t'ink* he's dead," he muttered, and without continuing he turned away.

But Ninada had only heard his first utterance.

"*Dead!*" she repeated wildly, as Manola, with a faint cry, approached her young mistress. And as Father Felix, puffing and blowing with his unwonted exertion, came hurrying up, the girl looked up in his face with beseeching eyes.

"Father Felix," she said almost inaudibly, "it is not true."

The good priest took Van's pulse between his fingers for a moment, then he reverently laid the limp arm by the side of the body.

"Alas, my daughter," he chokingly replied, "the poor boy is gone!"

With features on which stony despair was written, Ninada bent down and touched her white lips to Van's forehead. And then Manola extended her arms just in time to prevent the fainting girl from falling across her cousin's prostrate form.

Three hoarse blasts from the whistle of the little steamer warned the others that Captain McGrath was growing impatient. The Scotchman was anxious to get to Para to take advantage of the market before the slower-moving trading boats. Like time and tide, he would wait for no man—or woman, as he grimly remarked to his Portuguese pilot, who stood beside him in the wheel-house.

"Tom," said Father Felix, in a hurried undertone, "there's only you now for the young leddy to look to as a protector till she gits among her own friends. The



saints forgive me if I'm wrong, but I mistrust the smooth-faced young furriner wid a devil hid back in his eye——”

“Trus’ me for dat,” grimly returned the negro between his strong white teeth. Then, catching Ninada from Manola’s arms, he strode with her rapidly toward the pier where the steamer lay in waiting.

In a state of merciful unconsciousness, the girl was taken on board and carefully laid on the canvas cot in Captain McGrath’s little stateroom, which he had placed at the disposal of the two females.

Flores, pale as death, cast a last glance backward at the spot where Father Felix, on his knees beside the outstretched form, was saying prayers for the repose of the dead. Then he ran down to the pier and sprang on board.

The fasts were cast off, and the boat, swinging out into the swift current, began her voyage.

Ascending to the wheel-house, Flores told Captain McGrath that his companion had been killed with a poisoned arrow, probably by a wandering Indian, who had robbed the body and fled. Flores—so he said—had made all arrangements with the priest for the young man’s burial, and, under the circumstances, they could have done no good by remaining. It was imperatively necessary that they should reach Para as soon as possible.

“Had the puir laddie much siller aboot him?” was the characteristic query of the canny Scotchman.

“Only a few dollars, I believe,” was the careless reply. Then, after accounting for the unusual presence of two females so far from the confines of civilization,



very much as Van had done in his partial explanation to Father Felix, the young man left the captain and walked along the deck to the little house further aft. Tom was standing before the door, grim and inflexible.

"Let me pass. I wish to inquire how Miss Ninada is," imperiously demanded Flores.

"No, sah," was the equally firm response. "Miss Ninada gib orders she not see nobody."

"She'll see me, though," said Flores, sharply. "Let me pass, I say."

But as he attempted to thrust the negro aside, Flores, greatly to his dismay, felt himself suddenly urged to the light rail around the deck. Seizing the youth's collar in his muscular grip, the black twisted him over the rail and down into the narrow gangway below, to the great delight of a sooty-faced fireman and engineer, who stood with folded arms in the engine-room doorway.

"It don't do for to monkey wid this colored party when he's de only purtector de han'somest young lady in de two continents has," remarked Tom, coolly resuming his position. It is probable that Flores began to think very much the same way after he had recovered somewhat from his surprise.

It was not until the following morning that Flores obtained speech with the young girl, whose eyes were heavy with weeping and loss of sleep. Nor would she see him excepting in the presence of Manola, and even then he could see that she instinctively shrank as far as possible from him.

"You wish to see me? what is it?" she said coldly.



"In—in view of all that has happened," returned Flores, with a certain air of determination, "you must understand, Ninada, that now you are to look to and be guided by me till we reach America——"

"*Never!*" passionately interrupted Ninada. "Tom," she called, and the big black, who had been leaning over the rail within earshot, approached.

"Tom," said Ninada, "you have been in America, and know its ways and customs, promise me that you will not leave Manola and myself till we are in the care of the lady for whom I have a letter from my father. You shall be richly rewarded if you serve us faithfully."

"I promise Father Felix I'd do dat, anyway," returned Tom, sturdily. "We'll talk about de reward some oder time. But how 'bout dis yer Flores?" he coolly asked, as the young man, whose handsome face was flushed with anger, glared savagely at him.

"He has nothing whatever to do with us or our movements," was the firm reply. "Only for him," she went on, her form quivering with excitement, as she pointed her slender finger directly at him, "only for him, who knows but that my murdered cousin might now be alive!"

"How dare you?" began Flores, choking with wrath, but an imperative gesture from Ninada checked his further speech.

"I will hear no more," she said, wearily. "I am half heart-broken and worn out as it is. And now, Tom," she continued, turning to the negro, "please send Captain McGrath to me. I wish to make some



arrangements for our passage money and get his advice on other matters."

And here we must leave Ninada and her fortunes for a while, to take up again the story of the chief actor in this little drama of real life.



## CHAPTER XXV.

## AN UNEXPECTED RECOVERY.

FATHER FELIX, who was on his knees beside Van, was somewhat rudely pushed aside by his native servant, who carried in one hand a big-bellied black bottle.

“Pepe, you vill’in,” cried Father Felix, dropping his beads from his fingers, “how dare you interrupt my prayers? And,” as his eye fell upon the bottle, “how dare you meddle wid my *cashaca*?”

“Had big hunt to find him,” coolly returned Pepe. As he spoke the native tore open Van’s shirt in front, and laid his ear to his breast for a moment. Then he pushed back one of the boy’s eyelids, and looked sharply at the eyeball. It was noticeable that this had not the grayish film peculiar to death, nor had the limbs the inflexibility known as the rigor of a corpse.

“Get out of the way,” rather gruffly demanded Pepe, who was a privileged character round the premises.

“May I niver,” muttered the priest, as he rose to his feet—“may I niver, if the half-breed don’t think he can raise a dead corpse with *cashaca*!”

It looked like it certainly. Supporting Van’s head on his knee, the native uncorked the bottle. Forcing Van’s teeth apart, he allowed a few drops of the powerful spirit to drop on his tongue. As it made



its way down the patient's throat there was a visible contraction of the windpipe, and as Pepe with a low chuckle repeated the dose, Van uttered a strangled cough.

"It's like a meracle—sure, wid a gallon of sech stuff in the house a man needn't die till he was tired of livin'!" exclaimed the priest, joyfully.

But this was only the beginning. Motioning Father Felix to raise Van up still more, the servant called for a tumbler. This he filled to the brim with the strong spirit, and held it to Van's lips.

"Drink it, me lad, it's the saving of yer life!" excitedly cried the priest, as Van weakly moved away his head.

Van obeyed, between terrible fits of coughing and strangling. Next the half-breed, seizing the young fellow's bared arm, applied his mouth to the puncture, around which the discolored flesh had risen into a hard egg-like swelling. Sucking at the wound, he spat on the ground, rinsed his mouth out and continued the process, while the priest plied Van with the liquor till the bottle was empty.

Yet so potent was the virus in his veins that the liquor had but little beyond a stupefying effect. But gradually the swelling decreased, and the flesh began to assume its wonted hue.

"*Bueno!*" grunted Pepe, and with the assistance of two or three of the servants, Van was placed in a hammock on the veranda—intoxicated for the first and only time in his life.

His stupor lasted nearly thirty-six hours. And when with a bad headache he awoke to new life, it was to



find another day dawning on the world—the beginning of the second one after the departure of the steamer.

“The saints be praised—for this my son was dead and is alive ag’in,” said a well-known voice. Raising himself upright in the hammock, Van saw before him Father Felix’s face, beaming with smiles.

“And they have gone!” exclaimed Van, in a dull, despairing tone, as the priest called out something in Spanish to the fat, turbaned cook, who was waddling past.

Very much puzzled to understand how Van should know this, and why his hands kept roving restlessly about his waist, Father Felix nodded. Then, as the colored cook brought a bowl of chicken broth, which Van devoured with eager relish, the priest curiously asked how much he remembered of what had happened.

Well, it was a strange experience. Whether it was that the poison had not been made strong enough, or Van’s exuberant vitality had counteracted its fatal effects, is uncertain.

But from the time he fell to the ground, Van was like one in a trance. His eyes were fixed, his tongue mute, nor could he move a muscle in any part of his body. Yet he could see and hear everything that passed with almost abnormal distinctness.

Thus he was enabled to describe the appearance of the Indian who had approached him as he lay on the green sward, and he was also conscious of being robbed of the money belt about his waist, but without the power of speech or motion.

He knew when Ninada fainted and was carried



insensible to the steamer, and his inward agony, as he heard the revolutions of the screw, when the boat began her journey down the river, can better be imagined than described.

All this he told Father Felix, but there was one part of his experience he kept back.

It was that of seeing Flores, pale as death, extending some gold pieces in his shaking hand to the Indian. And he did not say that as the latter disappeared in the underbrush, Flores himself had bent over him, removed his belt, and buckled it about his own body.

“And ye’ve lost what money you had. How much might it have been?” asked the father, who, without meaning to be inquisitive, had a little natural curiosity to know how much the Indian (whom he naturally supposed to be the robber) had benefited by his crime.

Van did not immediately reply. Taking out his knife, he ripped open the edge of the wide collar of his woolen shirt, and allowed five sparkling stones to drop into the palm of his hand.

“There were two fifty-pound Bank of England notes,” said Van, quietly, “a little gold, and about fifty diamonds like these”—extending his hand—“some larger, some smaller.”

“Good heavens!” muttered the priest. “The mines of Diamantina niver turned out no stones equal to thim.”

Selecting the smallest, Van placed it between Father Felix’s fingers.

“It will repay you for your kindness, and the half-breed for bringing me to life again,” he said, smiling; and, despite the protestations of the priest, he forced him to accept it.



"It's six carats if it's a grain," exclaimed Father Felix, holding the gem to the light. "It's a clear white, widout a flaw, worth a hundred milreis a carat at the layste. Why, man," said the priest, staring in wild-eyed amazement, "if the di'mun's was no bigger nor this one, ye've lost something like the value of fifty thousand dollars."

"They were nearly all larger," returned Van, with comparative composure.

Van felt tolerably easy in his mind after he knew that Tom had promised to keep a watch over Ninada. Could he know how fully she had placed herself under the negro's protection he would have felt easier still.

But the uncertainty and delay chafed him terribly. Heedless of Father Felix's offers to organize a party of Indian hunters, and scour the surrounding forests in search of him of the blow-gun, Van restlessly paced the veranda from early morn till eve, watching vainly for the expected trading vessel.

It was not until the tenth day from the departure of the steamer that a boat paddled by nearly a score of half-naked Indians came alongside the pier.

Through the medium of Father Felix, Van succeeded in obtaining a passage with the surly Portuguese trader. It was agreed that the latter should be paid on arrival at Para, where Van purposed turning one or more diamonds into ready money.

Two days were spent in loading the boat, and then, wild with impatience, Van shook hands for the last time with Father Felix, and stepped on board.

"Good-bye, and the saints be wid you," called the father as the boat was paddled away from the pier.



“Heretic though ye are, I’ve hopes of meetin’ ye in Hivin.”

Van waved his hand, and soon a bend in the river hid Atlaxa from view.

There were no more stoppages to be made, and the boat sped on with the swift current through days and nights, till one morning at sunrise the whitewashed walls of Para appeared in sight. Half an hour later the boat was alongside the custom-house steps.

Standing on the pier for a moment, Van looked about him in a sort of bewilderment. The same slow-moving panorama of indolent life presented itself as when, a few months previous, he had landed from the launch at the selfsame spot.

He could almost believe, as he stood blinking his eyes in the strong sunlight, that for a few moments he had fallen asleep with some of the idlers who were dozing in the deep shadows, and dreamed the singular experiences of the past weeks.

But rousing himself from his momentary abstraction, Van looked eagerly about the harbor. Two iron passenger and freight steamers, flying the English flag, were lying at anchor, while two smaller ones were moored at a pier some distance away. One of them, Van felt quite sure, was the *Carita*, which had taken *Ninada* from Atlaxa.

He had cherished a faint hope that his party were still in Para. He was more troubled than he dared acknowledge to himself, when, on boarding the little rubber steamer, he learned from Captain McGrath that they had sailed the week before in the new passenger steamer *Clytie* for New York. Moreover, no other boat would leave for that port for nearly a fortnight.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

## VAN HEARS SOME NEWS.

CAPTAIN McGRATH'S announcement that Ninada had left Para was an overwhelming blow to Van, and for a moment he stood silent and irresolute.

"But how happens it ye were resoocitated from the tomb, so to speak?" inquired the Scotchman with lively curiosity, after his questioner's identity had begun to dawn upon his mind.

Van briefly explained.

"Hoot, mon," said Captain McGrath, in a tone of astonishment, "but that were a braw story indeed, The young leddy 'll be fit to dee wi' joy when she kens you're alive," he went on, casting a shrewd glance at Van as they stood together under the awning, "for the fair lassie greeted sorely the passage. But the hansum chap wi' the deevle in his e'e—*he'll* na' be sa' pleased, I'm thinkin'," added Captain McGrath with a short dry chuckle.

For it seems that Captain McGrath had received a hint from Tom as to the true state of affairs, after Flores himself had intimated very strongly that sooner or later he purposed wedding the young girl whose father had been his guardian.



“But if she liked him na’ better than she showed the whiles they were aboard the Carita, it’ll be a cauld day before they be wedded,” remarked the captain with another chuckle—a remark, I need hardly say, which gave Van almost as much secret satisfaction as to learn that Tom had accompanied Ninada and her foster mother to America in the capacity of a personal attendant.

From Captain McGrath Van obtained the address of a reliable dealer in precious stones in the Calle da Presidio, one of the business streets of Para.

“I’m not an inqueesitive man,” he observed, dryly, “but I wouldn’t mind givin’ a good deal to find out what section of the Brazeels ye all came fra’, for the young leddy and the good-lookin’ chap baith wanted the address of a diamond broker where they could sell some stones.”

But Van laughingly evaded a direct reply, and after a little more conversation took his departure up town, leaving the Scotch captain in a state of quite unusual excitement at this episode in his prosaic life.

Mr. Isaacs the diamond broker of the Calle da Presidio—a keen-eyed merchant of the Jewish persuasion, who spoke without the intonation peculiar to his race—eyed Van’s rusty and battered pith helmet and travel-stained garb with something like disfavor as the latter entered his place of business.

But his features relaxed as Van mentioned his errand and produced the stones, two of which he offered for sale.

“The finest Brazilian stones I ever saw,” he said, for the moment allowing his professional skill to over-



rule his business caution. "Though diamonds are greatly depreciated in value since the market has become so flooded with South African stones," he added, hastily, and with a solemn shake of the head.

But Van, who had received a "pointer" or two from Captain McGrath, heard this assertion very tranquilly. When the merchant saw that his visitor knew something as to the value of a clear white stone, he became more placable, and, after some chaffering, a bargain was concluded.

"The only diamonds I have seen like these," frankly owned Mr. Isaacs, "were sold me by a remarkably beautiful young girl, accompanied by a female attendant and a colored servant, some three or four weeks ago, and shortly afterward I purchased three more of unusual size and brilliancy from a young man about your own age."

Van had of course expected something of the kind, yet it was not pleasant to know that Flores was disposing of Van's property as though it were his own; and that, unless he could overtake him in time, Van's entire stock of diamonds might be disposed of in the same way. Flores could easily represent to Ninada that they were some of his own property left in his guardian's hands by his deceased parents, by way of accounting for his means.

For Van felt perfectly sure that Flores would closely follow Ninada up and use every possible means to gain his former friendly footing. And what more natural to suppose than that the young girl, a stranger in a strange land, might gradually lay aside her distrust of her former companion?



This was rendered especially probable by the fact that she looked upon her cousin Van as no longer living. And if Tom had communicated the terrible news of her father's probable fate, that would be an additional reason why Ninada would turn to Flores for sympathy.

These thoughts—anything but cheerful ones—had passed in review before Van's mental vision, as he mechanically counted out his money. He had persuaded Mr. Isaacs to give it to him partly in gold, partly in English banknotes, as American currency was very scarce.

Parrying Mr. Isaacs's skillful questioning as to the particular Brazilian district where such fine stones were found, he hurried back to the pier and paid for his passage down the river, to the very evident relief of the Portuguese captain, who seemed to have been waiting anxiously for his return.

There are no hotels in Para—at least there were none while Van was there; but he succeeded in hiring a room from an American resident, who was trying his fortune in the South American city.

His next movement, now that he was well supplied with money, was to provide himself with a wardrobe to last till he should reach New York, and make the other requisite changes in his outward appearance necessitated by his constant exposure.

This was easily done. Before night one would have hardly recognized in the neatly dressed young tourist, sitting under a veranda and fanning himself with a Panama hat, the shabby looking voyager who only that morning had landed from an Amazon river trading boat.



How anxiously he counted the days pending the arrival of the expected steamer, needs not to be told. It was too warm for sight-seeing, even if Van had not experienced an abundance of that sort of thing since leaving Para months before. So he passed the greater part of his time in reading, writing up his journal, and chatting with the few English or American residents whose acquaintance he made from time to time.

Among them, of course, was the ubiquitous reporter, city editor, and compositor combined, of a small weekly paper, published in both English and Spanish.

It seemed that Mr. Blank, always on the lookout for something new, had scraped an acquaintance with Flores on the arrival of the party some weeks before, and by dint of skillful questioning extracted from him the fact that they had come from the mysterious province of Itambezi, but nothing more.

How he had discovered that Van had been in some way connected with the party, no one knows ; but he made that youth's life a burden during his brief stay, by his attempts at pumping and cross-examination, but all to no avail.

Still, the two were very good friends, and Mr. Blank loaned Van some back files of the *Para News Letter*, by means of which he got an idea of what had been going on during his absence.

Suddenly, in one of the numbers dated a day or two after his first arrival in Para, Van saw something which caused him to spring from his chair, and utter a sort of triumphant yell, to the manifest astonishment of passing pedestrians. The paragraph, which was headed "A Startling Sea Tragedy," read thus :



“Manuel Rodriguez, outward pilot of steamer Clytie, hence to New York, brings the following report. The morning before he left the steamer off Braganza shoals, he saw from the wheel house a man clinging to a partly submerged tree trunk. A boat was lowered, and the man taken on board in a terribly exhausted condition. His statement was in effect this: That his name was Joshua Peterson, master of the schooner Rattler, of and from Boston, Massachusetts, for Para. That on the night of the 14th instant, he then having charge of the deck, he was suddenly assaulted by two of the men, one of whom struck him a blow with a heaver, which, missing his head, broke his shoulder bone. At the same moment, and before he could cry out, he was forcibly seized and thrown over the rail—the schooner then moving about six knots. As he rose to the surface he fortunately grasped a floating tree trunk, to which he clung till rescued. Captain Peterson has no doubt but that his mate was murdered and thrown over in the same way, the undoubted object being to get possession of a large sum of money in gold known to be in the captain’s stateroom. Whether the mutineers purpose scuttling the schooner and reaching the shore in boats, or will take her to some far away foreign port where she can be sold for a song and no questions asked, is of course uncertain. On his arrival at New York, Captain Peterson will take proper steps to ascertain, if possible, what has been done with his vessel.”

This was indeed good news, and it greatly lightened the weary waiting for the expected steamer, which arrived in due time. Among the first to engage passage



was Van Briscoe, who of course had purchased only an outfit for the voyage, preferring to replenish his wardrobe suitably on arrival in New York.

But the French have a saying that "it is the unexpected which always happens," and it would seem as though in Van Briscoe's particular case this was indeed true.



## CHAPTER XXVII.

## THE VOYAGERS ON THE PARA.

THE Para, in which Van had taken passage for New York, was a bark-rigged iron steamer of about a thousand tons burthen. His fellow passengers in the after cabin were for the most part residents of the Brazils. Two or three wealthy sugar planters with their families on a pleasure trip, a few merchants visiting New York on business, together with a couple of English tourists, made up the list.

With the former class Van did not of course feel free to fraternize. Those of the gentlemen who were exempt from the pangs of sea-sickness spent their time in the smoking saloon. The two tourists, who were good fellows enough in the main, but had the usual British reserve and clannishness, scarcely noticed him.

They had been "doing" the Amazon, and, as a matter of course, one of them was intending to write a book.

"'Bampton'—where have I heard the name?" thought Van. He was pacing the deck by himself on the third day from Para, and heard the younger tourist thus addressed by the steamer's first officer, who was talking with him, while the other stood by the rail smoking in silence.

"Oh, I admit that the Yankees are enterprising and all that sort of thing, don't you know," Lord Bampton



was saying, as Van walked slowly past, "but when it comes to explorin' and adventure they can't hold a candle to us."

"Well, I don't know," cautiously replied Mr. Boltrope. "There was Kane and Stanley——"

"And against those are Scoresby and Speke, Livingstone, and a score of others," impatiently interrupted Lord Bampton, unwilling, like many of his nationality, to yield the palm to American enterprise in any form.

"Why, look where Sanderson and I have been," he went on, with an air of conscious pride, "along the Amazon and then up the Uraria and Canuma, reaching a point further in the southern interior than any other explorer, with the exception, perhaps, of my eldest brother, Edward. He, with Carl Schmidt, the naturalist, penetrated the Mumuru districts——"

"And never came back," murmured Mr. Sanderson, without removing his cigar.

"And never came back," said Lord Bampton, accepting the suggestion. "Can you name any American who has ever done *that*?" he added, in rather a boastful manner.

Edward Bampton! In Lord Bampton's sunburned face Van fancied he traced a shadowy resemblance to the ghastly features of one of the embalmed heads which he had seen in the Mumuru prison house.

As Mr. Boltrope hesitated for a reply—for it is no small matter to contradict an English lord—Van spoke.

"Excuse me for replying to a remark not addressed to myself," he said, courteously, "but *I* can tell you of an American who has gone farther into the Brazilian interior than Mr. Edward Bampton or any other English explorer."



Mr. Boltrope, who only knew Van as one of the cabin passengers, looked a trifle surprised, but chuckled internally.

"He'll settle the Britisher's hash, I'll bet a dollar," was his inward thought.

Mr. Sanderson said "Haw!" Then turning, he put up his single eyeglass, through which he stared for a moment at the presumptuous speaker in dumb amazement. And Lord Bampton likewise mutely eyed Van with a "Who are you, anyhow?" sort of air.

They saw simply a well-dressed, gentlemanly-looking young fellow, with manly features burned as brown as a berry by the tropical sun.

"Indeed," at length drawled Lord Bampton, with a supercilious look, "and pray who might this—er—American be, if I may ask?"

"Myself—Vance Briscoe of Massachusetts, very much at your service," was the unruffled reply.

Mr. Sanderson allowed his eyeglass to drop, and, shrugging his shoulders, muttered a half audible aside, of which only the words "Yankee" and "boasting" were audible. Mr. Boltrope removed his gold-banded cap and scratched his head in perplexity. Lord Bampton's aristocratic lip curled somewhat contemptuously.

"Of course, Mr.—er—Briscoe," he said, coldly, "you would hardly presume to make a—a statement of the kind unless you had abundant proof."

Without replying, Van turned and went below, whereat Mr. Sanderson laughed.

"I thought he was playing a game of brag," he said, "and of course——"

The speaker's intended sarcasm was cut short by



Van's reappearance. He brought with him the compass, cup, matchbox, and the fly leaf of the journal kept by the two explorers, Edward Bampton and Carl Schmidt.

"Here are my proofs," quietly observed Van, extending them to Lord Bampton. As the Englishman received them he turned quite pale, for the two first named implements were marked with his brother's initials, while the inscription on the fly leaf of the note-book told its own story.

As delicately as possible, Van very briefly related the story of his capture and escape from the Mumurus, and told Lord Bampton and his astonished companion of the embalmed heads. His description of the features established their identity beyond a doubt.

Lord Bampton who was of course greatly shocked at what he had heard, thanked Van warmly for his narrative, as well as for the relics of his brother's sad fate. But in vain the explorers sought to draw from him an account of his further adventures.

"For good and sufficient reasons, I am not at liberty to speak of my experiences in the interior," he replied, courteously but firmly, and, seeing that he was in earnest, they forbore further questioning.

"What d'ye think of Yankee enterprise *now*, Lord Bampton?" pertinently asked Mr. Boltrope, with an exasperating grin, as Van, raising his hat, walked away.

"Clear case of young America beating old England," frankly admitted the former, and after that, Van had no reason to complain of lack of attention. Indeed, as one and another of the cabin passengers heard concerning the young adventurer, he received rather more notice than was altogether agreeable.



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### A SUDDEN CRASH.

VAN had no desire to be reserved or seem unsociable. But apart from his intention of keeping everything relating to Itambezi as much of a secret as possible, he was too much absorbed in pleasurable anticipations of the future to care much for the attention of strangers.

He was looking forward to a possible meeting with Captain Peterson, his friend and benefactor. Flores, he felt sure, would never be found far from Miss Ninada, and he was pretty confident of confounding that youthful criminal and recovering his stolen diamonds—or a goodly portion of them.

Lastly, the most cherished expectation of all was that of appearing to Ninada literally as one from the dead. How joyful that meeting would be, Van hardly allowed himself to fancy. He was neither silly nor sentimental—much less was he in the slightest degree conceited. But he knew in his own heart, as well as though it had been spoken in so many words, that the young girl regarded him with a pure and abiding affection. And this was enough.

The steamer Para was to touch at one or two ports in Dutch and French Guiana, as well as at Nassau, New



Providence. Then, her course would be laid directly for the States.

The night of the fifth day out from port was one of those soft, starless ones so disliked by mariners when approaching soundings, on account of the danger of collisions.

The Para was some two hundred miles to the eastward of Cape George, headed well to the northward. A sharp lookout was being kept both on the bridge and from the bows, as the steamer went feeling her way along through the almost impenetrable darkness.

Van had retired early, but on this particular night he could not sleep. He lay tossing unrestfully on his narrow couch, hearing the steamer's bell strike the successive hours, and listening to the steady throbbing of the propeller as it churned through the comparatively smooth sea.

The warmth was intolerable. Rising, Van opened the bull's eye over the berth. Then, resolving to go on deck and walk himself sleepy, he began dressing.

He had just drawn on his trousers and vest, when, with a shock that threw him off his feet, a heavy mass crashed suddenly against the steamer's side.

Amid shouts from the deck and screams from the cabin, above which was heard the roar of escaping steam, the Para heeled to her bearings.

Van was thrown violently against the berth. He recovered himself, and very naturally sprang for the door, which seemed to be almost above rather than in front of him. At the same moment the water rushed in through the porthole, which he had left open for air.

He succeeded in gaining the saloon at the same time



with a score of half dressed, shrieking women and children, conscious that the floor was coming back to its ordinary level.

As he hurried on deck, it was to see the headlight of a large steamer apparently just backing away from the Para. A crowd of sailors were hurrying along the deck with sails from the sailroom.

Mr. Boltrope, with the second officer, was seeing that the boats were swung outboard, in readiness for lowering; while the purser and other officials were trying to quiet the affrighted passengers.

"Is the damage *very* bad, Mr. Sutherland?" asked Van, as Captain Norris's orders sounded clear and sharp from the bridge where he was stationed.

Mr. Sutherland, who had just come from forward, shrugged his shoulders and felt mechanically for his eyeglasses. Then, recollecting that he was in his shirt sleeves, besides being bareheaded and barefooted, he abandoned his search.

"She's cut down below the water line, and the bulkhead is so rusty they're afraid it won't stand the pressure," he said, concisely.

"No particular danger, though, Mr.—er—Briscoe," remarked Lord Bampton. In still lighter undress, consisting principally of under flannels, the latter was coolly watching the other steamer through a night glass. "They've got *their* boats over——"

"Stand by to lower the boats!"

There was an indiscriminate rush from the forward part of the decks. The cowardly crew, largely composed of foreigners, dropped the sails which they had been trying to get over the bow, and joined the struggling crowd of steerage passengers.



"See that the women and children are in the boats first of all, Mr. Boltrope!" was the ringing command from the bridge.

"Aye, aye, sir," came the ready response.

But a mob of shouting, excited passengers, half frantic with fear, is one of the hardest things in the world to control. Surging to the side, pushing past helpless women and screaming children, forty or fifty men from the steerage and crew sought to gain possession of the waist boat.

"Stand back—I'll blow a hole through the first man who comes a step nearer!" thundered the first officer, drawing a heavy revolver.

"Mr, Briscoe, will you and Lord Bampton give me a hand here?" he shouted, as, by the glare of a blue light, he saw them struggling to reach his side. In the rush and confusion, the remaining petty officers had all they could do to look out for their several boats.

Van, Mr. Sutherland, and Lord Bampton, being comparatively cool and collected, were enabled to render such effective service that in a shorter time than might have been expected the women and children were safely embarked.

But now arose a cry that the water had burst through the compartment bulkhead—a fact which became evident by the increased heeling of the steamer.

Up from the hold rushed the squads of grimy coal passers, firemen, and stokers. Frenzied with fear, they broke down all attempts at restraint and discipline.

"Into the boats—she's sinking!" was the universal cry, and all efforts at telling off each man to his place were useless.



Fighting their way in squads to the rail, they flung themselves recklessly over the sides into the Para's boats, as well as two of those from the other steamer.

Nothing more could be done, and as Captain Norris, who was among the last to leave, pushed his own way to the rail, Van saw Lord Bampton and Mr. Sutherland following.

And then for the first time Van remembered that his remaining diamonds, as well as his stock of ready money, were in his traveling bag below.

Two boats still remained along side, and Van, imagining that they would not push off till assured that the last person had left the doomed steamer, darted down the companionway.

But the saloon lights were extinguished, and it was only by remembering the location of his stateroom that he was able to find the door. To his dismay he found he could not open it.

In vain Van kicked and pushed—it only yielded an inch or two, while through the aperture poured a volume of water that nearly swept him from his feet.

“My life is of more value than the money!” muttered Van, as the steamer's increased heeling showed that the danger of being carried down in her was imminent.

Abandoning his attempt he groped his way back to main staircase, and rapidly ascended. Hardly had he reached the deck, when with a heavy lurch the Para rolled her wounded side under and began settling rapidly by the head. Van had barely time to cut loose a circular life buoy, thrust his head and shoulders through it, and fling himself over the weather rail.



Once in the water he struck out as well as he could, that he might not be drawn down in the great whirlpool already hissing and circling about the sinking steamer, which slowly settled and disappeared beneath the waves.

Till then, Van had not thought of any real peril by reason of the near proximity of the other steamer, and her boats.

But where *were* the boats? And for that matter, *where was the steamer?*

Confused and excited, Van shouted wildly as he saw a faint light glimmering like a star through the darkness. He knew it was the steamer's rapidly receding head light while the sound of the throbbing screw came fainter and fainter to his ears.

In all his varied experience of danger, Van says that he never felt such a sensation of terrible desolation as then came over him.

Fully two hundred miles from land, drifting at the mercy of wind and sea, in danger of being leisurely devoured by man-eating sharks, or perishing by thirst or starvation, who shall wonder that Van broke down and for a brief moment gave way to despair?



## CHAPTER XXIX.

## AFLOAT ON THE OCEAN.

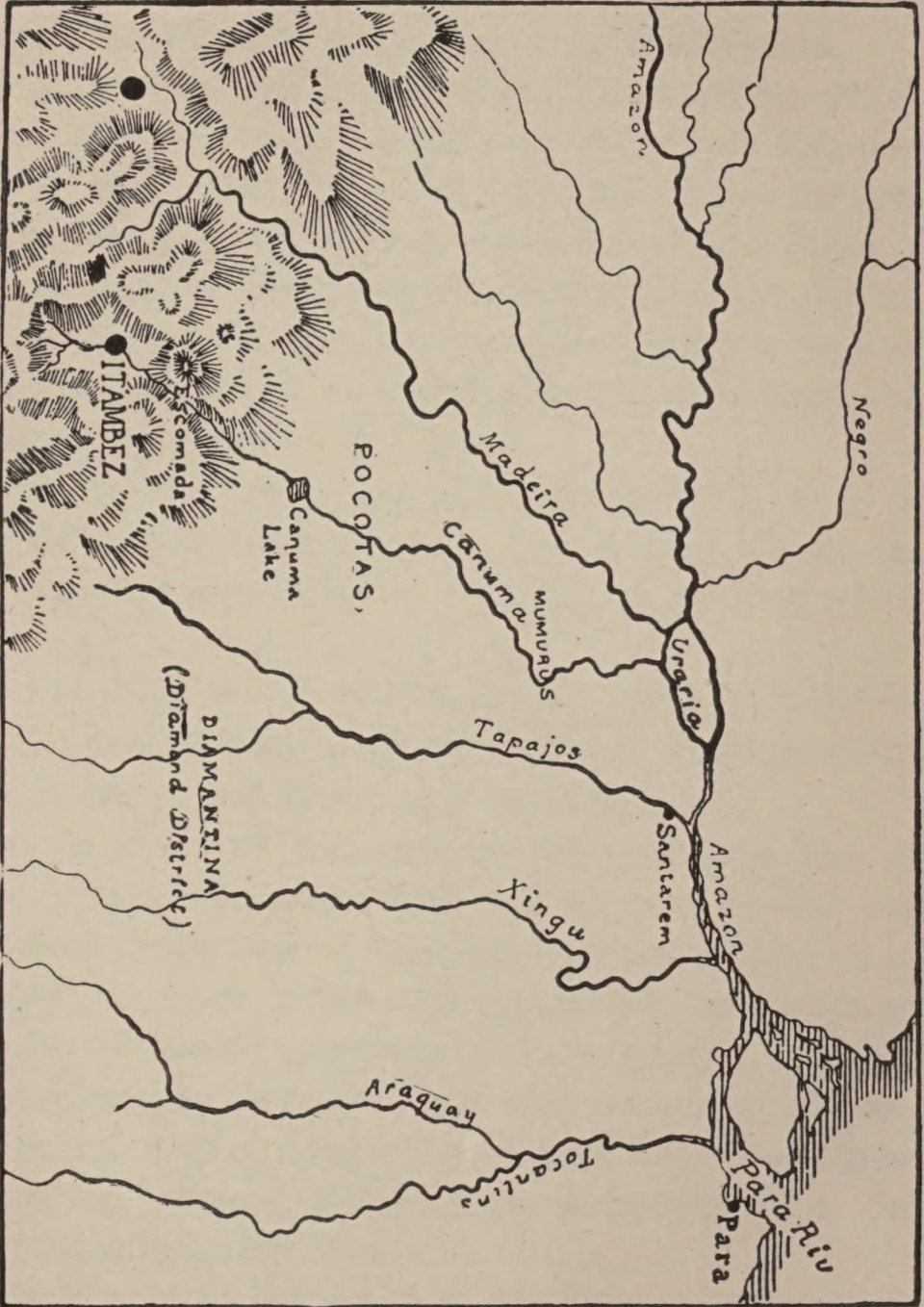
IF Van gave way to despair as he lay helplessly drifting upon the ocean waves, it was only for a moment. Recovering himself and summoning all his courage, he awaited, with what patience he might, the coming of dawn, rising and falling like a cork on the long, regular swells.

Surely never was dawn so long in coming. But the longest night must end, and gradually the gloom gave place to the gray, which in turn was shot through with sunbeams from the east.

Yet the sun, which finally rose from its ocean bed, revealed no sign of sail nor cloud of welcome smoke against the distant horizon. Higher and higher the luminary climbed in the heavens, sending down its burning rays on Van's uncovered head, which he was forced to keep continually wet with salt water by reason of the heat.

All through the weary day, now rising to the highest wave-crests, now sinking into watery abysses, poor Van was tossed to and fro till it seemed to him that the very motion itself would drive him wild. Again night shut down, but not so dark as the preceding one, while the water itself was aglow with the phosphorescent fire of the tr pics.





MAP SHOWING THE ROUTE FROM PARA TO ITAMBÉ.







And now occurred one of those strange incidents that to the average landsman seem to border on the incredible, yet which the sailor, accustomed to the marvelous in various forms, regards as only a verification of the well-worn saying that truth is stronger than fiction.

Van had fallen into a doze, if such it could be called. Though his eyes were closed and his senses half-dormant, he was conscious of the perpetual hiss of the sea, and his own perpetual upheavals and down-slidings.

The contact of his arm with something hard roused him from his partial stupor. Opening his eyes, he saw slowly moving past him a broken spar, apparently the larger half of a ship's royal-yard.

To reach out and grasp the iron jackstay was, of course, his immediate action. But, as Van did so, he nearly relaxed his hold in a paroxysm of instinctive fear.

For the spar, which at first he had presumed to be drifting, was moving steadily forward through some unseen agency, and drawing him with it.

What to make of this strange phenomenon Van at first did not know, and I had almost said he did not care. Unreeving one of the cord beackets on the rim of the buoy, he made it fast to the jackstay, and suffered himself to be towed passively with the spar.

As another day dawned, faint with hunger and choking with thirst, Van languidly rubbed his eyes free of salt crystals. Then, upborne on a heavy roller, he stared vacantly about him.

Not half a mile distant, coming down toward him, with all sails set, was a great ship, occasionally rolling from windward to leeward, and showing the bright



copper on the bottom, which glittered like gold in the sun-rays.

At almost the same instant his eyes rested on an object by no means so agreeable, and his heart, which had leapt into his throat at the sight of the ship, sank correspondingly low as the dorsal fin of an immense shark suddenly rose directly ahead of the spar.

But a moment later an ejaculation of surprise escaped Van's cracked and bleeding lips.

The mystery of the motive power which had borne him through the long night hours was solved. As the monster sank a few feet beneath the transparent surface, Van saw that a rope grummet, kept in place by an iron log chain, arranged like the bit of a bridle in the jaws of the shark, had been shoved over its huge head. Attached to this were two short warps made fast to the spar itself.

Burned into the wood near the slings of the broken spar was the inscription "H. M. S. Bellerophon." And Van at once understood that some of Her Majesty's sailors, having captured a shark, had harnessed him up for their own diversion. Thus hampered, the great fish was practically harmless. It could not dive to any depth, nor capture any prey, and must eventually die of starvation, or perhaps fall a victim to some of its own species. This last often happens to a shark thus "toggled," to use the sailor's phrase.

But Van had no time to speculate on the shark's predicament or possible fate. The course it was taking, he saw at a glance, was away from the coming ship. So casting himself adrift, he threw his arms feebly in the air as he was raised to the summit of the



alternate waves, to attract the attention of whoever might be on the lookout.

On came the ship, sending a column of foaming water from either side of the sharp stem. He could see the men at work in the rigging, could count the reef-points against the bellying white sails, and even read the name on the quarter-boards—the “Fred Bellingham.”

In vain Van tried to shout. His voice died away in a hoarse, inarticulate murmur, as the ship swept grandly past not half a cable's length away. In vain he swung his arms. No one seemed to be looking outboard, excepting the master, who, standing near the motionless helmsman, was apparently watching the moving spar, now a long way from Van himself, through his binoculars.

“It is no use,” was Van's despairing thought, as he sank in a great valley of the sea and lost sight of the ship for the moment. “It is no use.” And that his mind was partly unhinged by the terrors of his situation, Van says he is well assured.

For with a vague idea of suffering himself to sink rather than linger for days, it might be, in protracted agony, Van feebly tried to slip himself out of the life-buoy's embrace.

But fortunately he was too weak, so after one or two ineffectual attempts, he gave it up, and, closing his eyes, sank into the state of torpor induced by immersion in salt water, weakness and hunger.

Thus it was that he did not see a sudden change in the ship's movement, as her captain, by the merest chance, or, as I prefer to call it, Providence, turned his



glass toward the distant white object thrown to a wave summit for a brief moment.

As though by magic, her light sails were hauled up in the clews, her yards swung, and topsails laid aback to the mast.

A moment later a four-oared boat was lowered, and four pairs of stout arms sent her spinning buoyantly over the long seas in the direction of the life-buoy and its half-insensible contents.

“He looks like he was nigh gone—handle him easy, boys,” Van heard some one say, but his eyes were glued together by the action of the water, and his dry lips refused utterance.

But he knew that kindly hands were freeing him from the life-buoy, and he was transferred to a boat’s interior. Afterward he was conscious of being hoisted aloft, and then he knew nothing at all for some little time.



## CHAPTER XXX.

## ABOARD THE FRED BELLINGHAM.

As one under the influence of a narcotic, Van knew that his soaked clothing was removed, and his whole body sponged with warm water.

For, as one might say, he was pickled in the ocean brine. His hair was matted and streaked with fine crystals of salt; salt was in his eyebrows, and in the deep hollows under his eyes, which themselves were glued together by the saline particles.

At the same time, weak brandy and water was forced between his lips, alternated with spoonfuls of beef-tea.

Then, in a pleasant, dreamy frame of mind, in which the past and present were confusedly blended, Van felt himself lifted tenderly into a berth and covered with blankets. After this he fell asleep in good earnest, not having really slept in thirty-six hours.

Van had a curious dream towards the last part of his ten hours' slumber. He thought Captain Josh Peterson had entered the place where he was lying, and stood looking down at him.

It is asserted that if one looks steadily at the face of a sleeper long enough, the latter is sure to waken.



Whether this be so or not, all at once Van's eyes flew open as though moved by springs.

He must have been dreaming still. For gazing down at him were the kindly eyes and the weather-beaten face, framed in iron-gray hair, which had been familiar to Van from his earliest infancy.

Tears were trickling down his bronzed features, and as one of them plashed on Van's cheek, he knew that it *was* no dream !

"Captain Josh !" he exclaimed, finding his voice for the first time, and I think it no discredit to his manhood that as the captain—for of course it was he—stooped down and kissed the boy's forehead without speaking, the moisture filled his eyes in an instant.

Captain Josh Peterson was a Christian man, and Van heard him say half aloud :

"My God, I thank thee, for this my son was dead and is alive again—was lost and is found."

More beef tea, then a bowl of broth prepared by Sam Hi, the Chinese steward, the very fumes of which were enough to nourish and strengthen.

Van sat up in his berth, as Captain Peterson stepped to the door to give an order to some one passing and, glanced about him. The spare stateroom in which he found himself was considerably larger and more handsomely finished than any he had ever seen. There was a stationary washstand in one corner ; the curtained berths were paneled with rosewood, a handsome mirror was screwed against the walls, with brussels carpeting on the floor. The whole interior was plainly revealed by the shaded light of a handsome bracket lamp.

"You are on board the four-masted ship Fred Belling-



ham—twenty-seven hundred tons—the largest American vessel afloat, bound for Yokohama,” said Captain Peterson, answering Van’s look of eager inquiry as he returned to the side of his berth.

Captain Peterson went on to explain that having struck a tremendous gale from the east, the ship had been forced to run before it for three days, going far out of her course.

“But it’s an ill wind that blows nobody good,” he said, “and only for it I should not have had the wonderful fortune of finding you as I did.”

And then the captain told Van that it was only by one of those mere chances on which life and death sometimes hang, that, as he was taking his glass from his eye, after watching the moving spar, he caught a glimpse of Van himself in the life buoy.

And when in turn Van spoke of the service done him by the harnessed shark, Captain Peterson’s astonishment was great indeed.

“But no more for to-night, my boy,” he said, as Van was about to begin a more extended narrative. “You are not strong enough to talk too much, and a few hours’ more sleep will be better than medicine.”

And so it was that Van closed his eyes for a second edition of the much needed slumber. He was wakened from time to time by the deep clangor of the ship’s bell, or the tread of feet along the gangway, as some of the after sails were loosed and set, or yards checked in by the weather braces.

And in the morning Van was himself again. The steward brought him hot coffee and toast as a prelude to a heartier breakfast to follow, while Captain Peterson exhausted the resources of the slop chest to furnish him with wearing apparel.



But the ship was bound to Japan ; while it was for Van's interest to go in almost the opposite direction. What was to be done ?

The first thing, of course, was to tell Captain Peterson his story from the time he woke in the Rattler's cabin to find the schooner in possession of her scoundrelly crew, up to the loss of the Para and his own experiences—which narration took a good part of the forenoon.

Captain Peterson's interest, astonishment and delight in all he heard, cannot well be described. As he told Van his own experiences during his thirty years of sea life, they faded into tameness beside Van's strange record of the past weeks and months.

The importance of Van's return to the States as soon as possible, that he might secure his diamonds, was evident enough ; yet how this could be done was a rather perplexing question.

“ If we are fortunate enough to meet a home bound ship, I can easily transfer you to her,” he said, “ but I tell you frankly, the chances are rather doubtful. At Yokohama we shall probably load for San Francisco, and from the latter port you can go overland to Massachusetts in six or seven days.”

“ But in the meantime Flores may have got rid of half my ‘ inheritance ’—perhaps the whole or it,” rather ruefully returned Van. Yet I am inclined to believe that he was not thinking altogether of his diamonds in thus speaking.

But Captain Peterson thought otherwise. He reasoned that from what he had heard concerning Flores, the youth, though utterly unscrupulous and devoid of principle, was too shrewd and clear-headed to plunge into a career



of wild dissipation. Moreover, it was probable that he had no inconsiderable means of his own filched from Mr. Briscoe's treasure chamber.

All this seemed very reasonable, as Van reviewed each point in detail. Gradually he began to reconcile himself to the inevitable.

The account of Captain Peterson's own experiences after being thrown overboard was substantially as Van had read them in the *Para News Letter*. When his broken shoulder had reunited, he was obliged to seek for a chance to go to sea as soon as possible, for of course he was nearly penniless—his little all having been invested in the Rattler.

Through the kindness of a wealthy ship owner, he was recommended to the captaincy of the Bellingham, just off the stocks. She was loaded with case oil, and was twenty-seven days out from port when Van had been picked up. If they made an ordinarily good passage, Captain Peterson expected to reach Yokohama inside of four months.

This in brief is the account which Van heard from his guardian. To the former's petition to be allowed to make one of the crew, the captain turned a deaf ear.

"You'll go the remainder of the voyage as passenger," he remarked, "and there's no more to be said about it. Do you think," added the captain with a smile, "that I'm going to ship a young man before the mast, who is worth, at the least computation, fifty thousand dollars."

"If I succeed in getting it back," suggested Van, referring to the last clause of the captain's sentence.

And whether he did or not remains to be seen.



## CHAPTER XXXI.

### A LETTER FROM MAPLETON.

WITH the voyage around the Cape of Good Hope, across the Indian Ocean, and through the Straits of Sunda to the China Sea, this story has nothing to do. As I have said regarding the cruise of the *Rattler*, this is not a sea tale and Van's seagoing experiences are simply the connecting links between more important epochs in his eventful life.

So it is sufficient to say that the *Bellingham* reached Yokohama in safety one hundred and thirty-two days from New York. Here, among other letters awaiting the captain, was one from his sister Martha, mentioned in the earlier part of this narrative.

Now for good and sufficient reasons Captain Peterson had never taken his sister into his confidence regarding the strange letter he had received from Richard Briscoe more than a year before, and his own intentions with respect to it.

"Time enough for Patty to know when we see how the thing turns out," he had reasoned; "for she's such a hand to worry that she'd have Van and me dead a dozen times over, if she knew we were undertaking such a venture."



Hence she had supposed, in common with every one else in their native town, that the Rattler's voyage was simply one of her ordinary South American trading trips. And when Captain Peterson returned home with his broken shoulder, to tell of his vessel's loss, he had kept from her his own forebodings as to Van's probable fate at the hands of the mutinous crew. Nor did he even then hint at the real purpose of their voyage.

"Van is a smart, able-bodied fellow, and can take care of himself—don't fear, Patty, he'll come out of it all right," was her brother's hopeful assurance, and Martha could only wait and watch and pray for the absent boy who was almost as dear to her as if he had been her very own.

And now, having made this necessary explanation, I give Miss Peterson's letter word for word from the original, which lies before me on my desk :

MAPLETON, MASSACHUSETTS,

Sept. 22, 1886.

DEAR BROTHER,—I am so frustrated at all that's happened inside of the last five or six weeks, that I don't hardly know where to begin. And what I've got to write in just as few words as possible beats all the stories ever I read or heard of.

First and foremost—and it nigh about kills me to tell you—our poor Van is no more. I can't quite understand all the particulars, but it seems he got away from the wretches who came so near killing you, and went up the Amazon river with two others. Somewhere away back inland (you know I never was great on geography) is a big city. Here—if you'll believe me,



Joshua—he fell in with his own uncle that we’ve always thought was lost in a shipwreck years ago. And Dick Briscoe, who used to be a sweetheart of mine, had been living there all this time, and got married. And when our Van was ready to leave, Mr. Briscoe got him to take charge of his daughter, who he’s sent to the States for an education, with a foreign waiting maid, a colored man servant, and a young fellow that Mr. Briscoe was guardian of.

On the way back, poor Van was shot by some wild Indians, as nigh as I can find out. It nigh broke my heart when I heard of it. But if God has seen fit to take away our adopted boy, he’s brought some one to take his place, so far as any human *can*.

And now I’ll tell you how it all came about. Six weeks ago to-night a depot carriage stopped at the door. There was a colored man sitting with the driver, dressed as though he was just out of a band-box. And you might have knocked me down with a feather when he handed out of the carriage—first a foreign looking servant woman, and then the handsomest looking girl I ever set eyes on in all my days.

“Well, this was Dick Briscoe’s daughter I mentioned in the beginning of the letter. Her mother is dead, and her father wants her to have the best kind of an education, such as it seems there isn’t a chance for where she was brought up. Dick sent a long letter to me by Ninada—isn’t it an odd, pretty name? There’s lots in it that I don’t rightly understand. But he wants me to take Ninada under my wing. She is to live with us and all, as long as is necessary, and the board for her and her maid will be a great help, especially since



you have had such hard luck. Richard Briscoe must be tremendously rich. Such a quantity of diamonds as Ninada brought—thousands upon thousands of dollar's worth ! And she says I've only seen a few of them. I went in town with her, and Mr. Lincott, your old lawyer, is making arrangements to dispose of them and invest the money for her.

I have had the two spare rooms fixed up, and you'd think Ninada and Manola—that's her maid—had always been with me, they settle down into our way of living so easy. For all they come from a foreign country, you'd hardly know it by their talk and ways. And I've just fallen in love with the girl herself.

Of course it was Ninada who told me about poor Van—that is, she told me part, and the colored man, who is going to stay awhile and fix up the grounds, told me the rest. There's some sort of mystery about the whole thing that I can't understand. Ninada, who has had a quantity of new dresses and everything she needs, wears only black and white, which in her country is deep mourning. She says that her Cousin Van was dearer to her than any living person, excepting her father, and she shall always dress in something the same way.

The young man who came to America with them calls himself Don Carlos Flores. He lives in great style in Boston, so I hear, and comes out to see Ninada very often—oftener than I like, for there is something I don't fancy about him. He is very smooth and gentle with Ninada, but I mistrust him all the same. How she feels towards him I don't quite know, for she seldom mentions him. But I notice she will never go to ride



or walk with him unless I go with them, though he don't like that at all.

At the conservatory, where she is learning music and the languages, Ninada is called the handsomest girl who ever studied there, and best of all, she is as good as she is lovely.

Then followed a long budget of home news, which has no connection with my story, after which Miss Peterson concluded by saying :

Captain Paul Brooks, who is just home from the Philippine Islands, thinks that he has seen the Rattler under another name, and differently painted—white, with a black stripe round the bends. She was then bound for Shanghai from San Francisco, but outsailed the bark he was in, so he could not board her. I think he said the name was changed to Viva.

I hope you can make some inquiries and see whether he is right. Who knows but you may get hold of your vessel again ?

Write me from Yokohama, and send your love to Ninada. You will think as much of her as I do when you come to know her.

Affectionately,

PATTY.

It would be impossible to describe Van Briscoe's sensations as he perused this letter after Captain Peterson had finished it. Regret that his supposed death had been productive of sorrow in the quiet house, anger against Flores, and above all a deep sense of joy that Ninada kept his memory green, were confusedly blended in his mind.



But what could he do? If he wrote them of his wonderful deliverance, there was more or less danger that it might reach the ears of Flores, who would of course lose no time in escaping with his ill-gotten booty. To return by steamer was a long and expensive operation.

So, after consultation with Captain Peterson, Van resolved to let things remain as they were until the ship reached San Francisco. Then, he would leave the ship, return by rail, and confound his enemies and delight his friends after the most approved style.

So the work of discharging the great ship went briskly on, and Van improved his time by seeing something of the Japanese kingdom. Soon the Bellingham was ready for sea again, and sailed for San Francisco.

Now just before sailing, Captain Peterson had written to the American consul in Shanghai inquiring as to the schooner Viva. In reply the consul had advised him that a schooner of that name had arrived in ballast, and sailed again with a cargo of *beche de mer*, trepang, edible birds' nests, and other delicacies intended for consumption by the Chinese colony in San Francisco.

So after leaving Japan, Captain Peterson got out his chart for a careful perusal.

Having studied the probable course of the schooner after leaving Shanghai, he made certain calculations based on the relative difference of speed between the two vessels, and their respective sailing days. Then he shaped his course accordingly.

"Stranger things have happened, and it wouldn't surprise me very much if we ran across the Viva before we're half way to Frisco," he said to Van. "Then we shall see whether Captain Brooks is mistaken or not."



“What would you do if you should overhaul her and find that the so called Viva was really the Rattler?” curiously asked Van.

“That depends upon circumstances,” was the dry response.

So the sea days went by with the usual varying alternations of wind and weather. Sails were “raised” from time to time, but none of them the one sought for. Two were barks standing to the east, one was an English brig, and another a large three masted schooner. But the Viva did not show up, and Van began to think that the chances of meeting her were less than those of finding a needle in a haystack.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

## AN EXCITING CHASE.

THE Bellingham's main royal was nearly as large as the top sail of an ordinary sized ship.

Comfortable ensconced in the slings of the yard, with his feet dangling over the bellying canvas, sat Van Briscoe, a hundred and sixty-five feet above the ship's deck, upon which the moving men appeared as pigmies.

The blue and sparkling sea, only bounded by the great circular arch of the sky, stretched out before his vision without a——

Stop though—there *is* a sail ! Or is it a far away sea bird or the low bushy spout of a sperm whale ?

Unslinging Captain Peterson's binoculars, Van placed them at his eye, nor did he remove them for nearly a moment.

“*Sail—ho !*”

And before the captain could bawl out the customary query, Van's clear ringing voice came echoing again from his lofty height.

“Seems to be a fore-and-after, nearly hull down—steering about sou' southeast.”

“I feel it in my bones that it's the Viva,” muttered



Captain Peterson, after responding with the usual "Aye, aye!"

The ship, under her usual canvas, was running with a free wind, and the dial plate of the patent log, drawn in a little before, showed that she was doing her eight knots "without making any fuss about it," as the mate remarked in making his report.

A few rapid orders were given, and the deck was alive with hurrying feet. Men swarmed nimbly up the rigging. The heel lashings were cast off, and the long studdingsail booms run out on either side, while a couple of sailors in either top overhauled the tacks and halyards for topmast and topgallant studdingsails.

Up went the triangular sails outside the swelling courses and pyramids of canvas above them, and were boom ended with many a cheery shout.

There was all the excitement of a chase in the old privateering days, without the attendant danger to life and limb.

Under the increased pressure of sail, the great Bellingham began to show what she could do when emergency called. The wind had freshened to a moderate gale, while the booming and bellowing, as it swept through the straining rigging and against the hollowing sail-cloths, was almost deafening.

Rolling heavily from port to starboard in her wild onrush, the sharp bowed ship tore her way through rather than over the woolly wave crests, sending great clouds of spray high above the knightheads, while a column of seething foam spouted upward from the stem and swept past on either side.

The perspiration streamed from the weather-beaten



faces of the two sturdy sailors who rapidly shifted the spokes of the big wheel to meet the swerve and sway of the plunging prow, and as Van descended he heard Mr. Murray the second mate read aloud from the log dial plate.

“Thirteen and a half knots strong!”

Little by little the distant vessel rose from the heaving horizon line, till with the aid of the glass it could be seen that she was painted *white with a black stripe*.

Captain Peterson shut his binoculars with a sharp snap.

“That’s the Rattler,” he said, quietly. “I should know the lines of her hulls and the set of her sails if she was coated with gold leaf.”

“But supposing the schooner has been sold to some innocent purchaser—you don’t propose taking her from him by force, do you?” asked Van, in considerable perplexity.

“No ‘innocent purchaser’ would buy a vessel without getting a clearer title than the fellows who stole her could give,” was the dry response. “At any rate,” he added, with a glance at the bending spars and straining canvas, “I propose overhauling her and going aboard—after that, I shall know what further to do.”

“She’s setting a squares’l for’ard, sir,” said Van, who had taken possession of the captain’s glass.

“Looks like a guilty conscience,” grimly responded Captain Peterson, “for an ordinary trader would hardly try to run away from a ship that outsails her two to one, simply as a matter of pride.”

“Perhaps they think, from the Bellingham’s size and press of sail, that she’s a man o’ war,” suggested Mr. Mattox, the mate.



“Her trying to run away is all the more suspicious then,” returned Captain Peterson, shortly, and seeing him so determined to find the offender guilty, neither Van nor the mate ventured further remarks.

But the great squaresail, only used in running directly before the wind, availed the schooner but little against the tremendous speed of her pursuer.

By three o'clock in the afternoon the breeze began to subside, and seeing that even without the studdingsails the Bellingham could overhaul the schooner, the flying kites were hauled down and stowed and the studding-sail booms rigged in.

Mile by mile the distance lessened between the two vessels. The signal for heaving to was set at the ship's masthead, but those in the schooner paid no attention whatever to it. This was in itself a most suggestive circumstance.

“I've half a mind to do as they used to in old privateering days—run alongside, grapple with and board her?” growled Captain Peterson.

For though he might heave his own ship to and lower a boat, the schooner of course could outsail the best efforts of the oarsmen, if the breeze only held.

“The wind is dying out fast, sir,” said the mate, glancing astern and then aloft, where the canvas was beginning to alternately “lift” and distend.

Mr. Mattox was right. Gradually the steady breath of the strong trades gave place to fitful puffs, which in turn died down till the heave and surge of the wind-tossed sea of the morning subsided into long, even, oily swells, faintly ruffled in spots by the breath of the expiring breeze.



“Swing out and lower the gig,” said Captain Peterson, as with courses and light sails clewed up and hanging in the brails, the ship lazily rose and fell on the heaving breast of the Pacific.

In the mysterious way in which stories drift from the cabin to the forecastle, the sailors had become apprised of the truth, and the order was obeyed by the deck hands with even more than their usual alacrity.

Captain Peterson in the stern sheets, with Van beside him, looked quite excited as he urged the four strong oarsmen to renewed efforts, and the light double-ended craft fairly flew over the smooth heaving surface.

“The Rattler for a thousand pounds,” muttered Captain Peterson between his clinched teeth.

Van, though comparatively inexperienced, saw as they neared the schooner that Captain Peterson was right.

The white paint work, rusty and discolored, had worn off in places, showing the original coating of glossy coal tar below the bends.

Across the stern was a band of black, to correspond with that which extended around the schooner's sides. On it, in very rude lettering, was the name, “Viva,” and hailing place, “Grimsby.” But though the boat was still some little distance away, the rays of the declining sun, which shone full on the vessel's transom, showed half obliterated letters.

“Sheer off there!” called some one in a gruff voice, at the sound of which Van and Captain Peterson exchanged significant glances.

And with the words the dwarfed, thickset figure and coarse, repulsive features of Smith appeared at the taff-



rail. His sinewy hands clutched a rifle which Captain Peterson recognized at a glance, and by way of emphasizing his command, Smith cocked the rifle and threw it to his shoulder in an unpleasantly suggestive manner.

"Ease rowing—back water," said the captain in a low tone. He had not anticipated any such determined movement as this, and it was evident that for once Captain Josh Peterson was nonplussed.

Whether Mr. Briggs had recognized Captain Peterson and Van or not, it was very evident that they were not to be allowed on board. In his wrath the captain forgot his good judgment.

"I know you, you scoundrel!" he roared, choking with anger, "as well as I know my vessel daubed over with white paint, and if you and your gang don't swing for this, my name isn't Josh Peterson!"

"The fat is in the fire *now*," ruefully exclaimed Van, as Briggs, without turning his head, spoke in quick sharp tones to some one behind him.

The shrill pipe of a boatswain's whistle resounded along the deck, and half a dozen men ran aft. Casting off the gripes which held the schooner's boat in place, as it lay keel up on the house, they lifted it off.

A shining four pound carronade, such as might be carried on board a yacht for firing salutes, was revealed to the astonished eyes of the boat's crew.

Almost at the same moment, a lithe, red shirted individual sprang up beside it, and, coolly slewing the little gun in the requisite direction, depressed the muzzle till it pointed directly at the boat.

"It's Bates!" muttered Van, as the man drew back the hammer and took the lanyard between his fingers.



"We're not receiving visitors—be off with you!" he called in clear, curt tones, but with no signs of surprise or dismay at the sight of the two familiar faces in the boat.

"A man's vessel is his castle as much as his house, and he's a perfec' right to hinder anybody he don't want from comin' aboard!" added the irrepressible Mr. Smith.

At a given signal, five or six men, among whom Van recognized two of the former crew, ranged themselves at the rail, each holding a handspike or heaver in his grasp.

There was no help for it. Under the circumstances it would have been the height of folly to have attempted to board the schooner in the face of such odds. Just how far Captain Peterson might have been justified in attempting to take possession of his own vessel without proper legal authority is another delicate question, though one which did not for a moment enter either his own or Van's calculations.

Giving the word to pull back to the ship, Captain Peterson shook his fist in impotent wrath at grinning Mr. Smith, who, notwithstanding the peculiar situation of the schooner, seemed to take it very easy. So also did the pseudo captain, who doffed his cap with mock politeness as the boat was rowed back to the ship.

"If the breeze springs up again they'll sneak off under cover of the darkness, and run down among the South Pacific islands," said Captain Peterson, who was in a very bad humor. In company with Van he paced the quarter, as the sun disappeared in a great cloud-bank of gorgeous coloring.



“Barometer’s going down as though a gale was in prospect,” remarked Mr. Mattox, who had just emerged from the cabin.

Yet to an inexperienced eye there was nothing to denote a coming blow. The air was still and warm, the sea ran in long, oily folds, and an occasional star twinkled in the dusky vault overhead.

But far away in the distance a watchful ear could detect the faint mysterious moaning, known to sailors as “the weep of the sea,” which is in effect the dim echoing of warring elements miles and miles away—the forerunner of the dreaded cyclone.



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## VAN'S RECKLESS ENTERPRISE.

THE hours wore on, and the same dead expanse of calm continued. The light sails were snugly stowed, and the courses furled, in readiness for the expected blow, yet nothing seemed to come of it.

About eleven o'clock Captain Peterson, after vainly trying to trace the schooner's whereabouts in the darkness, for she showed no light, went below, instructing the second mate to give him a call in case the slightest change in the weather took place.

Van had never seen his guardian so depressed, nor did he wonder at it. His own property—all he was worth in the world, in fact—was not a pistol shot distant in the hands of an unscrupulous gang of scoundrels, yet Captain Peterson was powerless to help himself. The moment a breeze sprang up the schooner would creep away through the gloom, and that would be the last of her.

True, if the calm continued all night the Rattler would have to remain as she was, yet that did not help matters. Even in case of a wind it would be impossible to range the great ship alongside the schooner without danger to both vessels, in the form of carrying away spars or rigging.



Now Van, usually a prudent and by no means impulsive young fellow, had been meditating a wild scheme in his own mind ever since the unsuccessful return from the schooner.

His idea, which will be described further on, was not so much due to any particular courage, or even to desire of praise on his own part, as to sympathy for his guardian's trouble, and an earnest wish to help him out if possible.

There was no need of saying anything to Captain Peterson about it, so he told Mr. Murray, the second mate, with whom he was a great favorite. All he need do was to let him—Van—take a half dozen picked men from the Bellingham's crew, and arm them with handspikes or heavers.

Then, under cover of the thick darkness, it would be the easiest thing in the world to row or paddle alongside the schooner, and take her entire crew—some of whom were sure to be asleep—by surprise.

But the second mate stood too much in awe of his commander to consent. Besides, he argued that the Rattler's people might be anticipating some such move, and take measures accordingly. No—that wouldn't do at all.

Van was bitterly disappointed. His great fault was an over confidence, whose growth had been strengthened by his surprising good fortune in the adventures he had heretofore encountered. And having got the project firmly fixed in his mind he could not give it up so readily.

But he said nothing, though he kept up a due amount of thinking for some little time.



Just before eight bells Mr. Murray went forward to see that the ship's lights were burning brightly and the lookout attentive to his duty, leaving Van on the quarter.

The young fellow looked quickly about him. The sea was of glassy smoothness, not a breath of air stirred, and the darkness was intense. Far away through the gloom shone a tiny pin point of dull flame which he knew must be the schooner's binnacle light.

The man at the wheel had nothing to do but hold one of the spokes in his hand, for the ship was not under steerage way. Beckoning him to the quarter, Van pointed to one of the falls of the gig, and at the same time cast the other from the cleat.

"Lower away softly, Bob," he said, in a whisper; "I'm going on a bit of a reconnaissance."

It is not likely that the sailor knew the meaning of the word thus used. But was not Mr. Briscoe Captain Peterson's adopted son, and as such to be obeyed without questioning? Of course the captain and Mr. Murray the second mate approved of Van's intention—and so Bob, not without some little show of hesitation, obeyed.

Hardly had the boat touched the water before Van had descended the fall, unhooked and pushed away from the side. His idea was simply to get as near the Rattler as possible, or even alongside, and if he saw no signs of any particular show of precaution to return quickly to the ship, and try and get Captain Peterson's consent to the plan he had proposed to Mr. Murray.

It was a reckless, harebrained undertaking, and down in his secret soul Van knew he was doing wrong in



taking the step he had. Still reasoning that the end would perhaps justify the means, he kept on.

The composition rowlock, intended for a steering oar when needed, was wound about with braided sennit, so that Van found he could scull the light twenty-foot boat without the slightest perceptible noise.

There was no danger of losing the Bellingham, whose red and green lights, rising and falling with the lazy roll of the ship, could be seen nearly a mile away, while the glow of the schooner's binnacle lamp made a little halo in the gloom as he softly urged the boat toward it.

As he drew nearer and nearer, Van held his oar motionless and listened. Perfect stillness is, of course, an unknown condition of things at sea, for in the calmest of calms, when the faintest zephyr is asleep, the pulsing of the ocean's breast is always heard.

Save for this and the occasional creak of the schooner's main boom, the "plap" of reef points against the useless sails, and the distant swash of water about the bow, the silence was unbroken.

Van gave his oar a few rapid though silent turns, and, drawing it in, let the boat drift forward by its own impetus toward the dusky mass which suddenly loomed out of the darkness before him.

That the schooner's wheel was deserted, he could tell by the reflection from the binnacle light. Fending the boat off with both hands, Van took a turn with the painter round the main plates, and listened again.

A murmur of voices from somewhere forward showed that some of the crew, at least, were awake. Whether they were on the watch against a surprise or not was another thing.



The bull's eyes in the side of the after cabin trunk were thrown open for air—also to let out the clouds of tobacco smoke from pipes or cigars.

Crawling cautiously up into the main channels, Van lifted his head above the rail, as he heard Smith's harsh tones a little upraised.

"And I say we'd better hew some sweeps out from the spare spars right away, and try and get out of this, instead of layin' here waitin' for a breeze."

"You'll see breeze enough before the morning watch, I tell you, if the barometer's correct," was the short reply. Then, before the other could speak, Bates, taking something which jingled from the table drawer, went on :

"I'm going to hang these handcuff keys here under the clock, in case they should ever be wanted in a hurry—don't forget."

The sailor grunted something inaudible.

"It was a mistake takin' those niggers aboard from that there brig," he said, in grumbling tones. "We'd better 'a' kep' on direc' to 'Frisco instead of turnin' out of our course a thousan' or so miles to run down to Hawaii."

Niggers aboard! What could that mean, thought Van, wonderingly, when Bates spoke up again, very sharply :

"That's my affair! Captain Phillips had run short of grub, and had a hundred and fifty black skins to feed and water. For half a dozen barrels of rice and some damaged bread we've bought ten likely darkeys that will bring a hundred dollars a head in Hawaii at the very least——"



"But I don't understand it, nohow; ain't slavery abolished in the Sandwich Islands?" interrupted Smith.

Captain Bates laughed, unpleasantly.

"Well," he drawled, "they don't *call* it slavery exactly, but it amounts to the same thing in the long run. Natives are kidnapped by the dozen in the South Seas, and run into Honolulu. The government winks at it, and the nigs, who can't help 'emselves, are 'let out' at so much a head—say a hundred dollars—to the planters, who promise 'em that some day they'll be paid off and sent back. They don't get back, though; they're worked till they break down, and that's the last of 'em!"

Van's blood boiled with indignation, no less at the cruel scheme itself than the heartless way in which Bates had spoken of it. So then, in addition to her lading, the Rattler had slaves on board—was, in fact, a slaver!

But he had heard all he cared to, and now to get back to the ship and make his report. So far as he could see, there was no special watch being kept, and a surprise would be the easiest thing imaginable.

As Van thus told himself, he slipped back into the main channels and reached out for the boat painter. *It was gone!*

Hardly believing it possible, Van, getting down on all fours, groped excitedly under the channel plates. It was all in vain. In his haste he had probably made a slippery hitch, which had worked loose while he was listening in the gangway, and let the boat go adrift.

Of course there was but the one resource—to swim back to the ship. Erecting himself, Van began pulling



off his shoes with a fast-beating heart, for the situation was beginning to look decidedly serious. At any moment Smith or Briggs might come out of the cabin, and—

“What the blazes are you doin’ down there in the channels, Pedro—been at your old tricks of listenin’, I s’pose!” exclaimed a gruff voice almost in Van’s ear; and before he could obey his first impulse—to spring into the sea—he was collared.

Taken thus at a disadvantage as he stood on the narrow wooden ledge outside the rail, Van twisted and wrenched in fierce desperation, but the noise of the struggle brought Bates on deck.

“Give me a hand here, cap’n,” growled Van’s assailant, who was no other than the redoubtable Smith. “I’ve caught that there Pedro sneakin’ round the quarter ag’in.”

Captain Bates clutched one of Van’s arms, and despite the latter’s furious struggles he was dragged in and quickly overpowered.

“Why—what—this isn’t Pedro?” exclaimed Captain Bates. Kneeling on Van’s chest, while Smith deftly secured his ankles with a bit of seizing stuff, Bates passed his hand over the captive’s face. “Bring a deck lantern aft, one of you—d’ye hear?”

“By—the—livin’—Jingo—if—it isn’t that young Briscoe!” gasped the dwarfed sailor, as the yellow glare of the lantern was flashed in Van’s face. Captain Bates himself uttered an ejaculation of amazement, as the captive, pale but undaunted, returned the lowering gaze of the half dozen desperadoes who were crowded about him.



“There’s no boat alongside, and he’s dry, so he couldn’t ’a’ swum, muttered Smith, with a puzzled look over the rail.

A light puff of air suddenly struck Van’s cheek, and at the same moment the deep rumble of thunder seemed to jar the density of the atmosphere.

“Never mind him now—hustle him under the hatches—quick!” shouted Captain Bates, springing to his feet.

Without the slightest ceremony Van was dragged along the main deck. One of the hatches being taken off, he was dropped below on a pile of old sails, and the hatch and hatch bar replaced.

Then the sound of orders in quick succession, followed by rapid footsteps and hoarse cries, told of sail shortening in a hurry.

All at once a lurid bluish sheet of tropic lightning, penetrating the interstices between the hatches, lit up the dark interior of the hold.

By its momentary glare Van saw crouched about him the dusky forms of ten or twelve half-naked, dark-skinned men, whose eyes were fixed upon him with a sort of glittering intensity that was by no means pleasant. And in the same instant he heard the clinking of what he knew must be wrist or ankle chains, as they seemed to make a simultaneous movement in his direction.



## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## A THREATENED TRAGEDY.

AT the close of the last chapter, we were forced to leave Van Briscoe in the Rattler's hold with a dozen stalwart natives in his immediate vicinity, whose intentions might or might not be friendly.

This itself was bad enough, and in connection with the fact that his captors themselves would not be very likely to show him much mercy when he was finally brought on deck, it can easily be imagined that Van felt as though after favoring him in various ways Dame Fortune had suddenly turned and dealt him a slap in the face.

"Can any of you speak English?" he called, as the gloom was again momentarily illumined.

"Me Krooboy some palaver—not good," was the guttural reply from the one nearest him—a broad-shouldered black, less fierce in aspect than the others. "Who you live for, eh?"

Now the Bellingham's cabin boy was an intelligent young Kroo from the African coast, whose curious medley of "pigeon English" had amused and interested Van at odd moments.

And understanding the Krooman's query as it was meant, Van hastily explained, as well as he could, how



he came to be in his present predicament, and that he was no less a prisoner than the rest. This seemed to be duly interpreted by the Kroo to the others.

The black then went on to explain, in the extraordinary jargon used by this strange branch of the African race, and he himself had left an American whaler at the island of New Hebrides. With a few others he was kidnapped by Captain Phillips of the brig Allie Rowe, and afterwards transferred with eleven others, as we have seen, to the schooner Rattler, in exchange for provision.

While the Kroo was thus explaining, the noise of the contending elements overhead grew louder and fiercer. The thunder peals had become almost deafening, and the flashes of lightning momentarily illumined every nook and crevice of the dungeon-like hold.

Suddenly and without a moment's warning, the fury of the coming gale struck.

Over went the schooner on her side, while the pile of old sails and the manacled prisoners went sliding together to leeward.

That the Rattler had been thrown on her beam ends was self-evident, and it was a question for some little time in Van's mind whether she would be able to right herself.

Luckily the bulk of the cargo amidships had been well stowed, so that there was no shiftage—in which case the schooner must have gone down for a certainty. Gradually she began to rise, and was put before the gale, as Van knew by her tremendous onrush through the seas, which had risen with inconceivable velocity.

“Say, white fellow !”



It was the voice of the Krooman shouting in his ear—for the thunder of wind and sea, together with the straining and groaning of the schooner's timbers, made an almost deafening uproar.

As the black thus spoke, Van felt that the Krooman's manacled hands were fumbling about his own tightly bound wrists, and then he discovered that the African's sharp teeth were at work on the knots.

"S'pose you untie dis," said the Krooman, as he shook his own fetters angrily. "We black fellow fit to make waddy dem white mens on deck."

Now in the Kroo dialect "make waddy" has a wide range of signification. It may mean to dispose or to take care of, or several other things.

The jingle of his wristlets, emphasizing his speech, suddenly suggested the jingle of keys he had heard in the cabin but a little before. And like lightning Van remembered something that he had not thought of until then.

As is the case in most single hatch schooners, the after part of the Rattler's hold could be entered through a trap or scuttle in the cabin floor. Van knew that in such a heavy blow all hands, both forward and aft, would be on deck. If he could reach the cabin and get the keys, the blacks could easily be released. And with their co-operation the schooner might again change hands.

No sooner had this line of thought occurred to him, than Van proceeded to act upon it. Taking the stanchion post under the hatch combing as a starting point, he clambered to the top of the bales of dried sea slugs and similar delicacies composing part of the cargo. He



was followed, as he saw by a glimmering lightning flash, by the Kroo.

His limited acquaintance with the Kroo dialect, and the fact that darkness made it impossible to help out his meaning by signs, prevented Van from trying to explain his errand to the black, who was painfully worming himself along at Van's very heels.

But Van of course knew that the movement was dictated by a distrust of his own motives, so he thought the better way would be to say nothing and let the black see for himself what he was after.

The threads of light from the cabin lamp defined the square outline of the trap; and, having reached it, Van softly pushed it up—the aperture being directly under the stationary table.

Thrusting his head and shoulders through, Van saw that as he had suspected, the cabin, which was in dire confusion, was empty. He was about drawing himself up when the Kroo grasped him by the ankle.

“What for you live up dar?” he whispered, fiercely.

Taking hold of the black's handcuffs, Van tried to make him understand that he wished to release him, and partly succeeded. But the Kroo's glittering eyes followed Van's every movement, as, gaining the cabin, he steadied himself by the table and grasped the keys—three in number—from a nail under the loud ticking marine clock.

Then hearing some one coming he dropped to the floor and disappeared through the scuttle like an imp in a pantomime, closing the trap softly behind him.

The Kroo gave a grunt of satisfaction at Van's reappearance. But when, fumbling about in the darkness,



Van succeeded in fitting one of the keys to the simple old fashioned spring lock hand and ankle cuffs, and set him free, the black uttered a positive yell of joy, which was fortunately drowned by the louder tumult of the warring elements.

Snatching the keys from his liberator's hands, the Kroo worked his own way back to his companions with marvelous rapidity, followed as fast as possible by Van, who was rather dismayed at this unexpected occurrence.

In vain Van tried to explain to the Kroo his proposed plan of action, which was simply that as soon as the hatches were taken off to give the prisoners food or water, they were to rush on deck and overpower and bind the crew before they could recover from their surprise.

"We black fellows make waddy dem fellow on deck," was the only response, and the excited chattering of the natives showed that they were ripe for action.

Once freed, however, the party did not immediately make any definite movement, but sat squatting round the Kroo in a circle as he addressed them volubly in their own language, paying no heed whatever to Van.

As the hours passed on it became evident that the gale was abating, and the day dawn beginning to break. Thoroughly exhausted by all he had passed through, Van felt himself unable to keep his eyes open, and, regardless of his surroundings, stretched himself on the sails for a short nap.

How long it continued, Van does not know. The first thing that awoke him was the noise of the hatches being taken off and thrown violently to the deck, while at the same moment a flood of sunlight, streaming on his upturned face, almost blinded him.



Starting to a half sitting posture, and vaguely wondering as he did so what had become of his dark-skinned companions in misery, he looked up to see five or six men, among whom were Smith and Captain Bates, crowding about the hatch combings and gazing down at him with evident exultation.

“The nigs has stowed away funder for’ard. Havin’ a chief amongst ’em makes ’em too high-toned to ’sociate with a white chap,” said the dwarfed sailor, with a coarse laugh, which was echoed by the crew.

“Now, Mr. Briscoe,” remarked Captain Bates with smooth suavity, “if you will please step on deck there are a few questions——”

An ear splitting yell, which fairly made Van shiver, cut short the invitation.

At the same moment a simultaneous cry of alarm from those about the open hatch was followed by a sudden scattering in every direction.



## CHAPTER XXXV.

## CAPTAIN VAN BRISCOE.

THE cause of the sudden commotion on the Rattler's deck was soon apparent. "Handspikes, boys! those black fiends have got loose!" hoarsely shouted Captain Bates, but the sound of a dull crashing blow, a groan, and then another chorus of yells told all too plainly of the terrible tragedy that was being enacted on deck.

As well attempt to oppose one's unaided strength to the fury of a cyclone as to restrain a dozen infuriated savages from vengeance upon those who had dragged them from their island home to destine them to a life of captivity and suffering.

It was the knowledge of this fact, and not any lack of courage on Van Briscoe's part, which made him thrust his fingers in his ears and bury his head in the folds of the canvas to shut out as far as possible the sounds of the contest above him.

Thus he remained till a comparative quiet ensued. Resuming his former position, Van listened with a sort of sickening dread, but only the occasional monotone of a voice speaking in native dialect reached his ears. Above him was the blue sky flecked with clouds, and with every easy windward roll of the schooner, the



warm sunrays flashed into the damp interior of the hold.

Summoning his fortitude to meet some terrible spectacle, Van caught the hatch combings with his hands and swung himself on deck.

But his fears were groundless. The only signs of what had taken place were a few splashes of blood on the insides of the bulwarks, which the Kroo was industriously scrubbing with a deck broom, while the natives, squatted in the brilliant sunshine, were chattering volubly with every evident appearance of ecstatic joy.

As Van knew later, they had slipped through the hatch in the cabin floor while all hands were gathered about the forehatch.

Then, arming themselves with clubs and heavers, they had made a sudden rush forward. How many fell before them Van could never find out. But that the captain and Smith were the first victims he had good reason to believe. Two, and possibly three, were suffered to cut loose the boat from the stern davits and make good their escape.

Van could see the distant boat rising and falling on the waves, but too far away to tell how many had escaped.

"We make waddy *some*," was the only information he could obtain from the grinning crew, and as the boat itself was never heard from, the true facts of the tragedy will probably never be known till the sea gives up its dead.

That the Bellingham was nowhere in sight did not surprise Van very much, as he knew that she had probably been put before the gale on the previous night.

And what then?



“S’pose white fellow palaver.”

Gently touching Van’s shoulder as he thus spoke, the Kroo, with a grin of significance in the direction of the distant boat, took a seat beside him on the house.

“We make waddy some white fellow,” he repeated, with a significant gesture, but he either would or could not understand Van’s questioning and pantomime by which he tried to find out how many or who had been the victims.

And now followed a long “palaver,” to use the word by which the Kroo managed to express so many different meanings. Of course Van knew very well that the intent and purpose of the blacks would be to return to their own island of New Hebrides.

Yet there were many obvious reasons why this plan could not be carried out. In the first place, Van knew that his duty was to take the schooner to San Francisco if possible, at all hazards, in order that his guardian might not only receive his long lost property, but also be relieved from additional anxiety as to the fate of Van himself.

Then again he did not feel himself by any means competent to navigate the vessel among the intricacies of the South Sea Islands, and even had he been competent, how could he ever get away from New Hebrides without a proper crew, which he could not of course find there?

These, with other obstacles to such a course of action, which will readily occur to the reader, presented themselves to Van’s mind as he listened to the jargon of the Kroo, who interpreted his own clumsy answers to the natives.



The nearest the black could come to the word "island" was "land." Pointing to himself, then to the others, the Kroo finally evolved this rather peculiar proposition :

"S'pose you white feller cap'n um vessel. You sail we black feller for land—we go home."

Well, San Francisco was the nearest port, and from there the kidnapped natives could be sent back to New Hebrides in one of the many trading vessels to the South Seas. But it was not wisdom to go into detail, particularly as it would be impossible to make himself plain.

So Van nodded.

"You make me live captain—I take you to land," he said quietly, and his reply being interpreted to the others, a universal hand clapping attested to their delight.

Like all the inhabitants of New Hebrides, they were tall and powerfully built, with strongly marked African features, that in repose showed no signs of the savage ferocity which characterizes the cannibal race. But what Van thought most of just then was their ability to become good sailors, for a wide expanse of ocean yet remained to be crossed.

Before anything else was attended to, Van brought Captain Peterson's sextant on deck in readiness for taking the sun when its highest altitude should be attained. With it he also brought the chart and log book for an examination. He easily ascertained the schooner's whereabouts at the time she was becalmed the evening before—which was about 40 degrees north and 165 degrees west, or about two thirds of the way across the North Pacific.



Van's movements were watched with almost superstitious awe by the ignorant natives, especially when at high noon he took an altitude and figured up his reckoning, finding the schooner had run and drifted about seventy miles south of her supposed position.

Van's principal misgiving had been lest the Kroo, having learned something of practical seamanship on board the American whaler, might possibly question the easterly course which he was directed to steer, when, with considerable awkwardness on the part of his new crew, the schooner's sails had been hoisted and the wheel spoke unbecketed.

But he quickly saw there was no cause for fear on this score. Though the Kroo knew the points of compass to steer by, he knew nothing further. The chart was as much a sealed book to him as to the others.

It need hardly be said that the awkwardness of trying to make this undisciplined crew understand by signs which ropes to pull or what sails to trim was at first terribly trying.

But they were quick to comprehend, and, with the Kroo's assistance, the principal ropes were pointed out and their names and uses learned before the sun had sunk below the ocean's rim.

Luckily for all concerned, the indications of sea, sky and barometer pointed to a season of fairly good weather. Van installed the Kroo as his chief officer, and divided the natives into watches.

Most of them were still wearing the single garment of *tappa* cloth in which they were kidnapped, but this was soon remedied. In the little forecastle under deck was all the clothing belonging to the Rattler's crew.



One by one the dusky warriors arrayed themselves in patched trousers and dingy shirts, invariably worn after the manner of a Chinese blouse, but head or foot covering they did not require.

It was nightfall when Van, leaving the Kroo at the wheel, with one of the younger natives who was learning to steer, went below for a more thorough examination of the cabin.

Everything seemed to indicate that the spurious captain of the Rattler must have been making considerable money, to judge from certain memoranda which Van found in the table drawer with the bills of lading. In the two trips the schooner had made since her capture, she had netted nearly six thousand dollars, and the cargo which she then carried bought, on account of "Captain Charles Bates and others," was valued at nearly as much more.

"It looks to me as though all this money must be on board somewhere," mused Van, after laying aside the memoranda and papers.

And he was right. Under the head of the mattress in the captain's berth was Captain Peterson's tin trunk. Of the sum originally left by the captain, some two thousand dollars still remained, the balance having been expended in the purchase of the first freight. But with this were the profits I have alluded to, so that Captain Peterson's former property was considerably exceeded by the present gain.

Further examination showed him that the pantry and store room were well stocked, and that the supply of water, if carefully husbanded, would last till they arrived.



With a very thankful heart, after a couple of hours' much needed sleep, Van relieved his dusky lieutenant at the wheel, and at the same time took one of his own watch with him, to learn the mysteries of the compass.

There were days of comparative calm, and blowy days; there were drenching showers and chilling fogs, thunder tempests and sudden squalls, head winds and fair breezes. But no heavy gales were encountered. The crew grew quite expert, and Van himself picked up a good deal of the native dialect to add to his lingual accomplishments, as the days lengthened into weeks.

But as it drew near the time when the headlands of the Golden Gate might begin to be watched for, Van began to feel decidedly nervous.

How would his crew act when they discovered the deception that had been practiced, and found that instead of their native shores, they had reached the haunts of civilization? And finally Van resolved to take the Kroo, who had become very strongly attached to him, into his confidence.

Watching his opportunity, Van called the Kroo down into the cabin for a "palaver," for the two had not only grown better acquainted with each other, but with each other's peculiarity of speech.

Now some of the Rattler's original cargo had been disposed of by her captors, either by exchange or sale—it was never known which. But in a small store room at the stern were a couple of boxes of merchandise intended specially for barter with the Indians of the Lower Amazon. Knives and hatchets, glass vases, gilt ornaments, beads, fish hooks, cheap firearms, and a hundred similar articles were included in the assortment.



Before bringing up the subject nearest his heart, Van opened one of the boxes, and displayed these treasures to the Kroo's astonished and envious eyes.

Then, as clearly as possible Van explained how he had deceived them, and why, and without giving the black time to express himself on the subject, Van went on to show him that in the country they were approaching, slavery or bondage such as had threatened them was unknown.

Further Van assured his hearer, who began to listen with something like attention, that the entire party should be sent back to New Hebrides, taking with them the two boxes of wares, part of which the Kroo had seen, if they submitted to the inevitable with a good grace.

And the upshot was, that after another long "palaver," aided by a display of the promised gifts, everything was made satisfactory, greatly to Van's relief.

Thanks to his training on board St. Mary's school ship, Van made his "landfall" with singular accuracy. And on a bright, breezy morning he took a pilot, who, accustomed as he was to seeing all sorts and conditions of men on shipboard, opened his eyes very wide at the sight of the youthful commander and his curiously appareled crew of six Polynesians.

The *Bellingham* *had* arrived full ten days previous. Yes—he—the pilot) could give him a berth alongside her, as she had not begun loading. Wasn't this white schooner the one suspected of being an opium smuggler—in fact, unsuccessfully searched for that contraband drug last voyage, when a Captain Bates had her?

This was news to Van, who returned a rather evasive



answer, and changed the subject as quickly as possible. A fair wind hurried the Rattler up the beautiful bay, and when the sun rose on the following morning the white painted schooner was swinging at her moorings a pistol shot from the city wharves, and a cable's length from the great four-masted American ship, *Bellingham*.

And now Van Briscoe's voyaging is over. All the surprise, amazement and delight felt by Captain Peterson at the recovery of his vessel and his adopted son, can—if I may be allowed to use the old expression—be better imagined than described. The good captain gladly undertook to carry out Van's promise to his dark skinned crew, with all of whom he shook hands heartily before leaving the Rattler's decks.

A few days, stay in San Francisco to rest and recruit, and provide himself with a suitable wardrobe, and then Van Briscoe, bidding adieu to Captain Peterson till they met again, took his departure overland for the Eastern States in search of his treasures.



## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## DON CARLOS'S BIRTHDAY FESTIVAL.

THAT June, generally speaking, is the one perfect month known to our New England States, will be admitted by the dwellers in that much abused climate.

When Van Briscoe had left Boston nearly fifteen months before, the trees were barren of leaves, the sky of a leaden hue, and the bleak winds swirling clouds of dust from the frozen ground.

When he returned to it, nature was smiling in her new summer dress. The trees were clad with foliage, the sky blue, and the winds, even if they were due east, cooled the atmosphere to just about the right degree of temperature.

Don Carlos Flores was enjoying life to the utmost. The novel experience of a New England winter had had its drawbacks, despite the warmth and luxury of his handsome suite of rooms in an expensive flat, and his long, fur-lined coat and similar devices for getting the better of Jack Frost.

But summer, with its manifold pleasures, was at hand, and Dan Carlos had blossomed out, so to speak, with the season. It was whispered that his wardrobe excelled that in which Mr. Berry Wall of New York delights his soul and displays his æsthetic tastes.



He sported a dog-cart, a high-stepping horse with silver-mounted harness, a brass bound tiger, and a pug dog to keep the tiger company on the back seat. He was negotiating for a yacht, and was thinking over whom he had best invite for a cruise from among his extensive circle of friends.

For Don Carlos Flores was said to be the youthful heir presumptive of an immensely wealthy Brazilian planter, who had sent his only son to America on a pleasure trip. And when in Boston or elsewhere did ever a young fellow with apparently unlimited means, and perfect willingness to spend them, ever want for real or pretended friends?

It sometimes seems to me as if there are no "boys" in the higher circles of city society now-a-days. At fifteen they are full fledged young men—dressing like their older acquaintances, and, alas, too often imitating their vices.

The fame of the "young millionaire," as Flores was often called, had spread among this class of whom I speak. I mean the over-dressed youths in their teens, who spend much of their time at pool and billiards, and who affect cigarettes and champagne cocktails.

Unlike the majority of these, Don Carlos was his own master. His lavish expenditures, together with a style of living which was modeled after the manner of young men about town with abundant wealth in their own right, gave Don Carlos a certain prestige with those near his own age, who envied him such freedom of action and purse.

On the evening of June 3, 1887, Don Carlos was giving a little "spread" at his rooms in honor of his



nineteenth birthday. The oldest person present was young Goldwin, who had just attained his majority, but one might have thought from the tone of conversation and general bearing of the company, that all were thorough men of the world.

After the several courses had been cleared away, a large bowl of punch was brought in, and the two waiters retired to the entry within sound of call.

Don Flores, in full evening dress, sat at the head of the table. Large diamond studs glittered in his shirt front, rubies handsomely mounted served as cuff buttons, while on the middle finger of his left hand he wore an opal the size of a Lima bean set in a heavy gold band.

Yet though his rooms were furnished in the most sumptuous manner, while those present seemed to vie with each other to make the occasion one of gayety and mirth, Don Carlos's handsome face, flushed with wine and excitement, wore a troubled look.

He could not shake off the presentiment of evil. His mother's sad face had appeared to him in his troubled dreams the night before; and her warning words rang in his ears above the laughter and jokes going on about him.

*"Repent and make restitution while yet there is one more opportunity!"*

This had been her warning, and Flores could not drown its remembrance. "One more opportunity." What did it all mean?

"I'm actually growing nervous," muttered Don Carlos, stretching out his hand for his half emptied glass.



“Why, Don Carlos, old chappie—what’s come to your opal?” cried a beardless young fellow at his right, touching the ring as he spoke.

A sudden pallor crossed Flores’s handsome features as he glanced at the valuable gem. For the heart of fire, which had shown out through the milky environment, was no longer visible. Only a dull, opaque stone, without beauty or brilliancy, remained in the setting.

“Sure sign of bad luck, donchuknow,” remarked young Goldwin, with tipsy gravity, as all eyes were bent upon the ring. “Guess the beu’ful Miss—Miss Briscoe’s thrown you over—eh, ol’ fellow?”

Amid the chorus of laughter following this gentlemanly suggestion, no one noticed that the door behind the tall Japanese screen had been opened by a grinning waiter, who, pocketing a shining coin, silently admitted some one, and softly closed the door again.

“Well,” returned Flores, nervously recovering himself, as the laughter died away, “we’re all friends here, so I don’t mind telling you that nothing so bad as my friend Goldwin suggests has happened. In fact,” he continued, boastfully, “that my chances in that quarter are as good as they ever were, and the young lady herself is ready to say yes when——”

“Flores, that is false!”

The unexpected interruption came from Van Briscoe, who as he spoke, stepped quickly from behind the screen and confronted the astonished company.



## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## CONCLUSION.

EVERY person excepting Flores himself started to his feet. But all eyes were turned from the newcomer to the giver of the entertainment whose face was of ashy hue, as falling back in his chair, he stared in horrified silence at Van Briscoe. The latter, with folded arms, regarded him steadfastly.

"Who the doose are you, intrudin' into a private room?" demanded young Goldwin, who prided himself on his muscle. Bristling up like a bantam cockerel, he stepped forward with outstretched hand to grasp the collar of the rash intruder.

A moment later, the gilded youth was sent spinning half way across the room by what may be called a reverse action, Van having seized *his* collar, before the other could accomplish his own intended purpose.

"Will you send away your visitors? I want to speak to you alone, Flores," calmly remarked Van, as young Goldwin picked himself up and ruefully regarded his dress coat which was rent from the neck to the waist.

Flores, whose white lips had moved once or twice though no sound had escaped them, pulled himself together.

"I'm—I'm sorry," he said, helplessly, as he looked



around at his astonished guests, "but this gentleman and I have private business——"

The hint was acted upon. One by one the company murmured "good-night," and filed out. As the last one disappeared, Van locked the door behind him.

Indignant as he felt, Van was not without a feeling akin to pity for the discomfited young man before him, who, with a trembling hand, drained a glass of the strong compound still remaining in the bowl, as though to give him a fictitious courage for the coming interview.

"We—I—thought you were dead, Van," hoarsely began Flores, breaking the silence as he sat down the empty glass.

"So I supposed," was the deliberate reply, "when after you had paid the Indian for killing me—as you thought—with a poisoned arrow, you robbed me of my money belt containing my diamonds."

This was coming to the point with a vengeance. Protestation, pretended anger, excuses and lies died away on the young Brazilian's guilty lips.

"You—you can prove nothing," he hoarsely whispered.

"I do not wish to," coolly replied Van, who had never removed his eyes from the blanched face before him. "That is," he went on in a significant tone, "unless you refuse to do what is right."

"*Repent and make restitution while yet there is one more opportunity.*"

Was the warning actually whispered in his ear? Or was it but the echo of a guilty conscience, repeating the words he had heard in his dreaming?

Flores glanced fearfully about him, and Van felt an



involuntary thrill as he became conscious that a faint breath of cool air had fanned his cheek. This was perhaps a passing zephyr from one of the long open windows, yet the night air without lay heavy and still.

"What do you want?" finally asked Flores in a constrained voice.

"Only what is my due—or at least as much of it as I can hope for after your spendthrift career that I have heard of from a dozen different quarters since arriving in town," answered Van, shrugging his shoulders as he looked about the luxurious apartment.

Well, there was no help for it. With a sullen, lowering face, Flores unlocked an elaborately carved desk, and produced a small steel strong box. From this he took the missing money belt, in which a goodly number of Van's diamonds still remained, also some United States bonds, a thick roll of bills and a bank book representing a considerable sum.

Flores could of course only make a very rough estimate of his expenditures, the amount of which in the short space of eight months, astonished even himself. True, he had used something of his own means, but a few of Van's largest diamonds were missing, and the value of these were made good as far as it was possible to estimate it, by the money which Flores handed over.

By how many thousand dollars Van was the loser, neither he, or—to do him justice—Flores himself knew, but it was no inconsiderable amount. Yet even as it was, the former found himself in the possession of what for so young a man might be called a handsome fortune, while Flores himself had a large balance remaining.



Humbled and crestfallen to the last degree, Flores asked no questions as to Van's strange and unexpected resurrection. All he seemed to desire was to get the business settled and close the door behind his unwelcome visitor.

"And now," he said sullenly, without lifting his eyes to Van's face, as the latter secured his restored wealth inside his coat and buttoned it tightly about him, "now I suppose you will make the town too hot for me."

"Do you think so badly of me as that?" was the calm response, and Flores looked up for the first time in astonishment.

"But you will tell—Ninada?" he said in a low tone.

"I cannot promise as to that, but if I do the secret will be safe with her for the sake of poor Mr. Briscoe, if for no other reason," returned Van, after a little hesitation.

"*Poor* Mr. Briscoe!" echoed Flores. "Why, didn't you know that he escaped from Itambez after all, and reached the States a couple of months later than the rest of us?"

Van uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"I did *not* know it, for I only arrived in Boston this afternoon," he said—and then there was a silence which was only broken by Van rising to his feet.

"Flores," he said, gravely, "though you attempted my life and have done me a great wrong, I hold no enmity against you. Indeed I forgive you freely. And I *do* wish," he said, taking the unresisting hand of the young man, whose crimsoning face and downcast eyes proved that his sense of shame was not altogether lost,



"I *do* wish for your dead mother's sake, Flores, that you would repent of your intended sin and lead a better life hereafter."

Between repentance and being sorry for one's wrong doing there is a considerable difference. Yet however this might have been in the case of Flores, it is certain that his eyes suddenly filled with unaccustomed tears, and in a rather broken voice he answered :

"You are a thousand times better than I, Van Briscoe. I *will* try and do differently."

And these were the last words Van ever heard him speak. They silently shook hands and on the following morning it was rumored that Don Carlos had settled his bills and departed from the city without the formality of bidding adieu to his large circle of regretful friends and acquaintances. Beyond the fact that he was known to have bought a ticket to Chicago, his destination remained a mystery as it does to this day. And so passes the misguided young man from my story.

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"But somehow I cannot make it all seem true, Cousin Van," said Ninada, who, more beautiful than ever, sat beside Van who held both her hands in his own.

Mr. Richard Briscoe and Patty Peterson, who had listened to Van's story, had stolen from the room to compare notes concerning it, leaving the two young people alone in the old-fashioned parlor of the Peterson homestead, a few miles outside of Boston.

"I find myself troubled the same way, Ninada," laughed the young man, but his voice was tremulous



with repressed emotion, as his eyes watched every movement of the lovely, blushing face so near his own.

But what was said after this, I have no means of knowing. Van's journal and Van himself are equally silent on the subject. When Mr. Richard Briscoe came in half an hour later, they were sitting at opposite ends of the room, and as Van at once began talking very fast about his recent interview with Don Carlos Flores and its results, Miss Ninada had opportunity to regain her usual composure.

It seemed that Mr. Briscoe had been enabled to secure a considerable portion of his own wealth before he escaped from his dwelling, which ten minutes later was swallowed up in the general ruin. In company with Bob Martin and a number of others, he hastened on board a *gondolita* moored at the embankment, and they were borne out of danger by the swift current of the river, only reach Para after great peril and hardship.

Tom the negro had been faithful to his trust, so that until her father appeared in his own person, Ninada had known nothing of the destruction of Itambez, and was thus spared the agonizing sorrow which the news of his supposed death would have caused her.

Regarding Mr. Briscoe's belief in the singular predictions of the prophets of Itambez I have no comment whatever to make. It is sufficient to say that I know he was sincere in this belief as in that concerning the danger threatened Ninada at her sixteenth birthday. A great many wiser and better men than Mr. Briscoe, cherish equally peculiar fancies. In any event, he felt justified in sending his daughter away, and did so, and the events proved that he was wise in thus doing.



As for himself, I am sorry to say Mr. Briscoe is a fatalist, and so had remained behind with the majority of the Itambaz people till the destruction of the city was assured. Then, he very prudently got away as fast as possible.

Well, my story is drawing to a close. Mr. Briscoe has bought a beautiful home not very far from the old Peterson homestead, and it is currently reported that he has asked Miss Martha Peterson, his former love, to share it ; this with the entire concurrence of his daughter Ninada, who, never having known a mother's love, naturally reciprocates Miss Peterson's warm affection for herself.

Mr. Briscoe is known simply as a wealthy American who, having spent several years in the far interior of Brazil, has returned to his native country to pass the rest of his life. Ninada is loved and admired by every one, and has become a most accomplished, but I am happy to say, not a fashionable lady. Manola and Tom are retained in the household, whose affairs, indeed, would hardly run smoothly without them, and Bob Martin is a frequent visitor.

As for Van Briscoe, withwhom I have become quite intimately acquainted, he gives promise of an admirable manhood, and I feel confident will do great good with his wealth—for it is not impossible that some day in the near future he will be a *very* wealthy man, as Miss Ninada Briscoe herself is the presumptive heiress to a large property, to say nothing of riches inherited from her deceased mother which she brought away from Itambez with her.

For as you may have guessed, Ninada and Van are



to be married in due time—an open secret known to a large circle of friends and acquaintances, among whom is Captain Josh Peterson, who is expected to arrive home in time for the wedding.

And now having completed my own part of this narrative, it is with considerable satisfaction that I write the words—

**THE END.**



















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